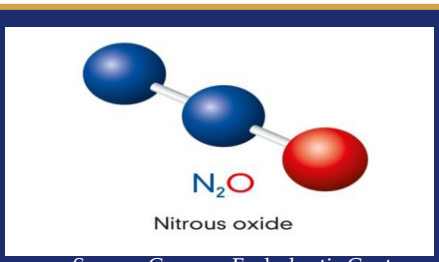
MIDWEST HIDTA "HOT SHEET"

NITROUS OXIDE OCTOBER 2026

Objective: The goal of this, and subsequent bulletins, is to provide information regarding identified changes in drug trends, and/or to educate and forewarn about newly identified substances. This bulletin summarizes public sources for training and awareness purposes only. It is not legal advice. Statutes and local ordinances change; confirm charging decisions with your prosecuting attorney and check the official state code before taking enforcement action.

Background

Nitrous oxide is a colorless gas used in medicine as an inhaled anesthetic and analgesic and in food service as a propellant in whipped-cream dispensers. Recreational misuse of whipped-cream chargers is commonly called "whippets."[1] Other reported names include laughing gas, nitro, NOS, nangs, hippy crack, buzz bomb, and balloons.[2]



Source: Conyers Endodontic Center

Nitrous oxide is not a federally controlled substance.[1] H.R. 7945, the Nitrous Oxide Safety Act of 2026, was introduced March 16, 2026. The introduced bill would prohibit the sale of covered nitrous oxide consumer products, with exceptions for specified medical, dental, commercial food-production, and research uses, and for nitrous oxide sold as a component of food in pressurized containers.[4] As of October 22, 2026, Congress.gov reported the latest action as the House Energy and Commerce Committee ordering the bill by a 36–0 vote on September 16, 2026; the bill has not passed the House or become law.[4]

How Nitrous Oxide Is Used in the Illicit Market

Retail Availability and Culinary Marketing – Nitrous oxide products marketed for culinary use are available through retail stores and online channels. These products can also be misused for their intoxicating effects.[1][5]

- **Products and branding –** The FDA's public warning identifies brands including Galaxy Gas, Baking Bad, Cloud 9ine, Cosmic Gas, Euro Gas, ExoticWhip, FastGas, HOTWHIP, MassGass, Miami Magic, Monster Gas, NITROX, and Whip-it!. Products are marketed in flavored and unflavored varieties as food-processing propellants.[5]



Source: WSMV4

- **Where it is sold -** FDA has reported availability through online marketplaces, including Amazon, eBay, and Walmart.[5] FDA and CDC also cite smoke and vape shops, gas stations, grocery stores, and convenience stores.[1][5] An August 2025 news report described at least one Colorado seller advertising 24/7 tank delivery on Instagram.[6]
- **The shift from small chargers to large tanks -** The UK Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs documented the availability of larger cylinders alongside traditional 8-gram chargers, including 600-gram and 2-kilogram products. Its assessment estimates that a 2-kilogram cylinder can release approximately 1,018 liters of gas, equivalent to roughly 500 small balloons. These are approximate released-gas volumes, not cylinder capacities.[7]

The Council found that some larger products were marketed in ways that deliberately targeted non-legitimate use. It also described sellers bundling nitrous oxide with balloons, "crackers" (devices used to open chargers), or vitamin B12 supplements.[7] U.S. poison-center researchers have identified flavored, high-volume tanks as a possible contributor to increasing reported misuse cases, rather than an established cause of that increase.[8]

Street-level and event distribution

- **Balloon sales at concerts and festivals —** An August 2025 news report described parking-lot vendors at Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheatre selling nitrous oxide balloons for $10–$30 each. During the July 3–5, 2025 Phish concert series at the University of Colorado's Folsom Field, university officials reported confiscating 61 nitrous oxide tanks and issuing one nitrous-related citation.[6]
- **Organized traveling groups —** In an undated report about a Phish concert at Merriweather Post Pavilion in Howard County, Maryland, WBFF reported that police arrested 12 people from four states and seized 32 nitrous oxide tanks, two cars, and cash. Police said the individuals worked together and believed they were part of a larger organization traveling the East Coast. These statements reflect police allegations reported by the outlet; the report's publication and event dates have not been confirmed.[9]


Source: BBC


Source: Zinnia Health

- **Regional example —** In September 2026, KLIN reported that Lincoln-Lancaster County, Nebraska, Narcotics Task Force investigators purchased a 0.95-liter canister of flavored Galaxy Gas at a Lincoln smoke shop, then returned the following day with a search warrant and seized six additional canisters. Police identified Nebraska's nitrous oxide sales restriction, § 28-1484, as the applicable statute. Investigators checked seven related shops and found no additional nitrous oxide. No citations had been issued as of the report, and the task force said it was conducting random spot checks of smoke shops.[10]



Source: KLKNTv

Field indicators for officers

- Items and circumstances described in public reporting and research include:
  - Discarded nitrous oxide chargers in parks, playgrounds, or event areas.[6]
  - Flavored or brightly branded nitrous oxide products, larger cylinders, whipped-cream dispensers, charger-opening devices, and balloons.[5][7]
  - People using alone in parked vehicles or holding cylinders between their legs, as described in research on heavy use.[11]
  - At suspected nitrous-related death scenes: tanks, whipped-cream canisters, chargers, plastic bags, masks, and professional or homemade gas-delivery equipment.[11][12]


Source: Washington Poison Center

- **Possible use with other substances.** Among Michigan poison-center cases involving recreational nitrous oxide misuse during 2019–2023, approximately 30% involved additional substances, most commonly benzodiazepines, cannabis, or alcohol.[1]

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Health Effects

Short-term Effects

- **Desired effects —** Euphoria, reduced anxiety, hallucinations, and dissociation begin rapidly and generally fade within minutes. Users may also experience disinhibition, disorientation, dizziness, blurred vision, and impaired judgment.[1][11]
- **Symptoms listed by the FDA —** Headache, lightheadedness, loss of consciousness, numbness, tingling, palpitations, frostbite, asphyxiation, and death.[5] Among Michigan poison center cases involving recreational nitrous oxide misuse during 2019–2023, the most commonly reported effects were rapid heart rate (19.4%), other neurologic effects (18.8%), and numbness (16.7%).[1]
- **Other acute complications —** Reported complications include hypoxia (insufficient oxygen), aspiration, irregular heart rhythms, seizures, injuries from falls or accidents, and pneumomediastinum (air in the central chest compartment). Severe oxygen deprivation can cause lasting brain damage.[12]
- **How deaths happen —** Fatal cases described in the literature most commonly involve asphyxiation. Masks or bags over the head increase risk because exposure can continue after consciousness is lost. Published reports include both accidental deaths and intentional self-harm. Sudden cardiac arrhythmia is another reported fatal mechanism.[11][12]



Source: The Guardian



Source: THE

Long-Term Effects

- **How the damage happens —** Nitrous oxide inactivates vitamin B12 and can produce a functional B12 deficiency. This can damage myelin, the protective coating around nerves, and cause subacute combined degeneration of the spinal cord.[1]
- **Nerve and spinal cord damage —** Reported effects include weakness, unsteady walking, tingling or numbness, and sensorimotor polyneuropathy (widespread damage to peripheral nerves affecting sensation and movement).[1][13] The FDA also lists paralysis, difficulty walking, and loss of bowel or bladder control. Spinal cord or brain damage may persist after a person stops using nitrous oxide.[5]
- **Psychiatric effects —** Reported effects include hallucinations, anxiety, depression, delirium, memory problems, delusions, and paranoia.[1][5]
- **Blood and clotting problems —** Reported complications include anemia resembling pernicious anemia (body cannot absorb vitamin B12 from your food), bone marrow suppression, abnormal blood counts, and blood clots.[1][5]
- **Heavy and compulsive use —** In extreme cases, users consume hundreds of cartridges or several 2 kg tanks during a binge. Researchers have documented symptoms of substance use disorder among heavy users and recommend considering nitrous oxide potentially addictive, although evidence about the prevalence and characteristics of addiction remains limited.[11]

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State	Named in cited law?	Personal Use / Possession	Sale / Distribution	Primary Authority
Iowa	Yes	Possession with intent to inhale or ingest for specified intoxicating effects, or knowingly and intentionally being under the influence: serious misdemeanor. Medical exception applies.	Distribution, or possession with intent to distribute, with specified intent or knowledge of unlawful inhalation: serious misdemeanor.	Iowa Code § 126.22 [15]
Kansas	No	Nitrous oxide is not listed in the toxic-vapor definition in § 21-5712. Other applicable laws and local ordinances require separate review.	No nitrous-specific sales prohibition identified in the cited statute.	K.S.A. 21-5712 [16]
Missouri	No	Nitrous oxide is not named in § 579.097. Local restrictions may apply.	Local restrictions exist, including Kansas City. Other applicable state and local laws require separate review.	RSMo § 579.097; Kansas City Code § 50-207 [17][8]
Nebraska	Yes (sales restrictions)	Intentional misuse under general inhalant provisions: Class III misdemeanor. This is not a blanket prohibition on possession.	Business sales/distribution to consumers restricted; exceptions for qualifying unflavored products for specified legitimate uses, including food preparation. Flavored products do not qualify for those exceptions. Knowing supply for intoxication separately prohibited.	Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 28-1484, 28-419, 28-420, 28-424 [19]
North Dakota	Yes	Intentional inhalation for specified intoxicating effects: Class B misdemeanor; third or subsequent offense within one year of first: Class A. Medical, dental, and optometric exception. No simple-possession prohibition in cited section.	No sales provision in the cited section.	N.D.C.C. § 19-03.1-22.1 [20]
South Dakota	No (general provisions)	Intentional use for intoxication, or knowing possession for prohibited intoxication: Class 1 misdemeanor. Statutory medical exceptions apply.	Knowing possession with intent to distribute, sale, or distribution for prohibited intoxication: Class 1 misdemeanor.	SDCL §§ 22-42-15, 22-42-15.1 [21]

Legal summary for training and awareness only. Offenses depend on statutory elements, intent, knowledge, and exceptions. Confirm current law and charging decisions with your prosecuting attorney.

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Officer safety - Nitrous oxide cylinders contain pressurized oxidizing gas. Although nitrous oxide is not flammable, it accelerates combustion. Gas release can cause cold injury, and accumulation can displace oxygen and create an asphyxiation hazard.[3] A published news report describes a New England Journal of Medicine case involving cold injury to the mouth and throat after inhalation from a nitrous oxide tank.[6]

Follow agency-approved procedures for identifying, handling, transporting, and storing compressed oxidizing-gas cylinders.

Nitrous Oxide Product Examples



Source: NY Times



Source: Infuzd



Source: BBC News

Key Points

- **Legitimate uses and misuse —** Nitrous oxide (N_2O) has legitimate medical and culinary uses. Products marketed for culinary use are available in flavored and unflavored varieties through retail and online channels. The FDA warns consumers not to inhale nitrous oxide from canisters, tanks, or chargers of any size.[5]
- **Poison-center reports have increased —** A National Poison Data System analysis identified 1,751 qualifying intentional nitrous oxide abuse/misuse cases among people aged 13 and older during 2003–2024. Annual reported cases increased from 28 to 401. Across the study period, 55% of qualifying cases had moderate or major clinical effects. These reports do not measure prevalence of use in the general population.[8]
- **Mortality findings require caution —** A U.S. death-certificate study identified 1,240 poisoning deaths among residents aged 15–74 during 2010–2023 using a nitrogen-oxides code that is not specific to nitrous oxide. Crude mortality rates increased through 2018 but did not increase significantly during 2019–2023.[14]
- **Major health dangers —** Acute risks include oxygen deprivation, asphyxiation, and cold injury. Repeated misuse can inactivate vitamin B12 and damage the spinal cord and peripheral nerves. Neurological injury may persist after use stops.[1][5][7]
- **State laws differ —** Iowa and North Dakota expressly name nitrous oxide in the cited provisions. Nebraska restricts business sales and distribution while preserving exceptions for qualifying unflavored products used for specified legitimate purposes. South Dakota addresses intentional intoxication and knowing possession or supply for that purpose under general statutes. Nitrous oxide is not named in the cited Kansas and Missouri inhalant provisions; other applicable laws and local restrictions require separate review.[15][16][17][19][20][21]
- **Routine drug screening has limitations —** Standard drug screens do not detect nitrous oxide. Scene evidence, observations, and exposure history are important to recognizing misuse. Specialized forensic testing is distinct from routine drug screening.[11][12]

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