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Professor Owen Bowden-Jones,
Chair of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs
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Nitrous Oxide

Dear Professor Bowden-Jones,

The abuse of nitrous oxide has been a source of concern for some time. While it has legitimate uses, such as in medicine, dentistry and as a propellant for whipped cream canisters, it is an offence under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 to supply nitrous oxide if a person knows, or is reckless as to whether, it will be used for its psychoactive effect.

The ACMD provided advice on nitrous oxide in 2015 and concluded that the harmfulness of nitrous oxide did not seem to warrant control under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Since then, use amongst young people has increased slightly: in 2019-20, 8.7% of 16 to 24-year-olds reported use of nitrous oxide in the last 12 months (which equates to around 549,000 young people)¹. There has been concern, in particular, over the long-term effects caused by the inactivation of vitamin B12.

In the light of the prevalence of the abuse of nitrous oxide, I would be grateful if the ACMD would conduct an updated assessment of the health and social harms of nitrous oxide and, following the assessment, advice on whether nitrous oxide should be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Should control be suggested, then I would welcome advice on appropriate scheduling under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001.

With all your wishes

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP

¹ [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#), December 2020