

Laughing gas (N₂O) in The Netherlands: where a quick rise in use required action

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Lisbon Addictions
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The Trimbos Institute is the Dutch focal point for the EMCDDA

The Trimbos Institute is a member of the European Information Network on Drugs and Drug Addiction (REITOX)



Effects of laughing gas (N₂O)

- Drunk-like state “spacen”
- Feelings of euphoria “laughter”
- Changed perception
- Relaxation of muscles, less pain

→ **Duration 1-5 minutes, but possibly longer!**



Harm and serious harms associated with laughing gas



Duizelig en verward voelen



Dingen zien die er niet zijn



Slap gevoel in armen en benen



Hoofdpijn



Tintelingen in handen en voeten



Geen gevoel in handen en voeten



Prikkelbaarheid



Misselijkheid



Flauwvallen



Verlamd raken



Verkeersongelukken

Developments in The Netherlands

Recreational use no longer regarded as unlawful use of a medicine

Preparations amendment of the Opium Act Decree and List II of the Opium Act

Advise Council of state → general N2O ban most suitable?

< 2016

2019

2020

2021

2022

2023

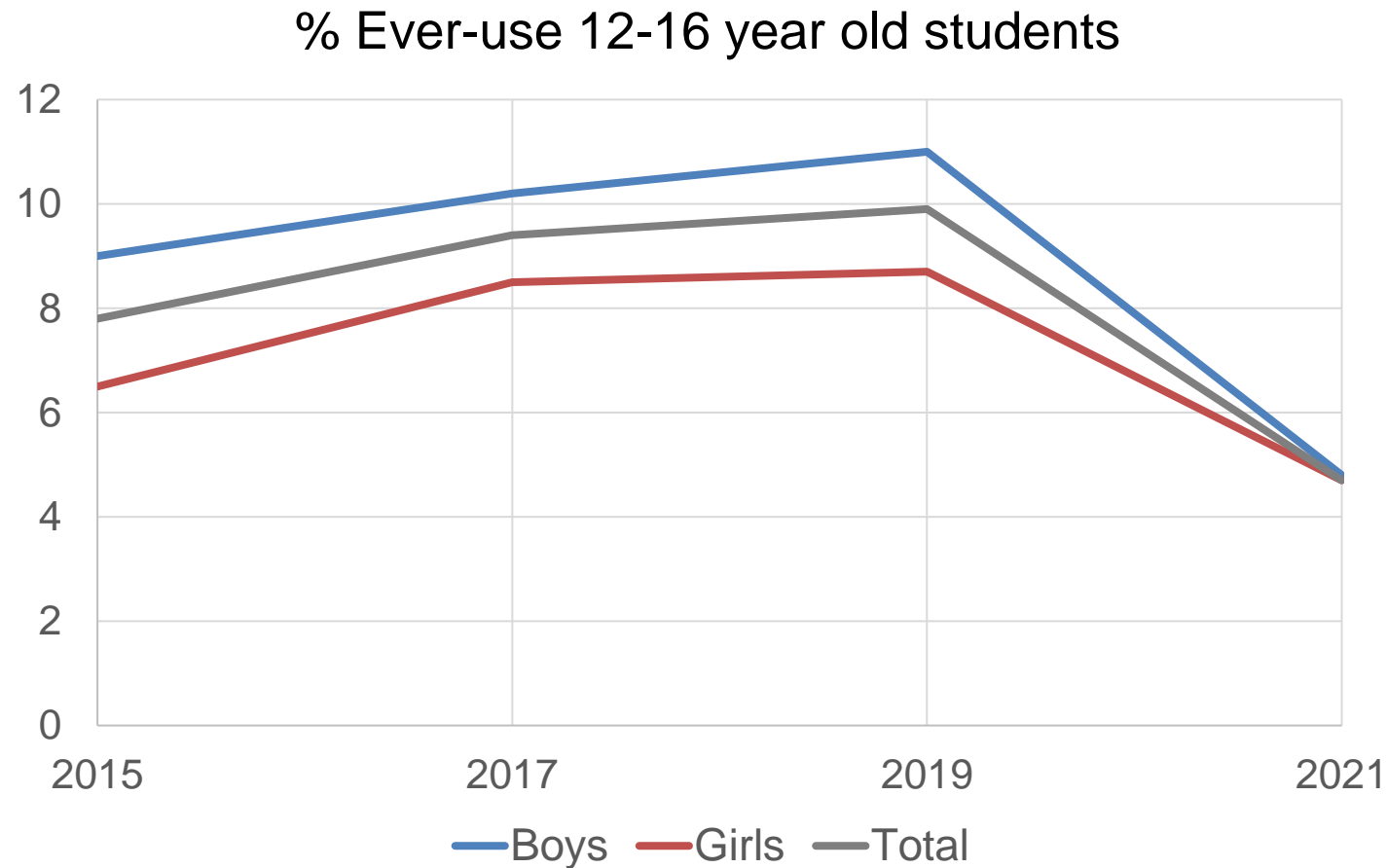
Risk assessment laughing gas by Risk Assessment committee

Draft bill to parlement

From January 1st '23 Laughing gas will be on List II of the Opium Act

Recreational N2O is potentially harmful; wide and easy availability should be reduced, more efforts needed to prevent use and warn about health risks

Developments: Prevalence of use (%)



- Young age groups
- Use higher in vulnerable groups

Why do people use laughing gas?

- **Individual level:**
 - curiosity, boredom, positive expectations, coping
- **Social level:**
 - Having a good time with friends, social media/peer pressure, copycat behaviour
 - Laughing gas as an 'allowed alternative' for alcohol
 - Public perception 'laughing gas is relatively safe'
 - Easy availability



Availability



- Big online market
- Change from canisters to cylinders → increase in compulsive use
- No limits to the quantities sold + No 'age check'



Laughing gas prevention?

- “New” drug, a lot of unknowns
- Not just health, but also safety
- Vulnerable and young users in sometimes ‘hard to reach groups’
- Legal status



NOS Nieuws • Donderdag 2 december 2021, 07:00



Lachgas afgelopen jaren gevonden bij 1800 ongelukken met tientallen doden



Prevention strategies (1)

- **Strengthening of local prevention networks:** (municipality in the lead, focusing on reducing supply and demand)
- **Outreaching** prevention methods (youth workers) that focus on early detection of (problematic) use and building relationships



Prevention strategies (2)

- Increase awareness in **first-line professionals** such as GPs, physiotherapists etc early detection of symptoms
- **Parents:** Raising awareness about risks, early signs of use and informing on actions (folders and video's)



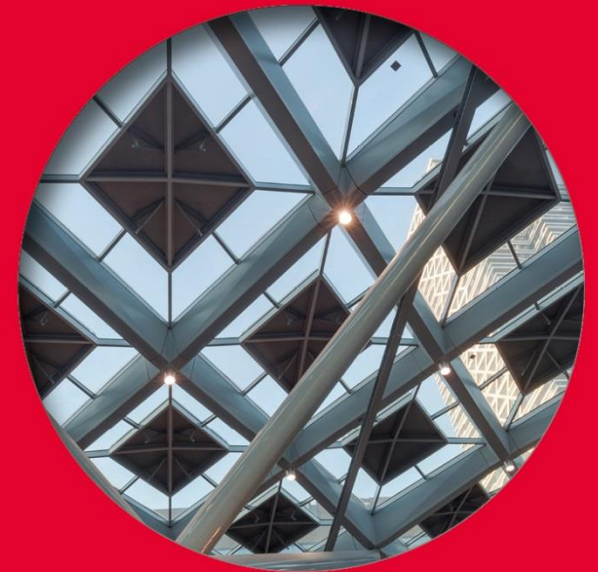
Concluding

- Laughing gas is associated with various (serious) health harms and problematic use
- Prevention should focus on preventing problematic use and early detection
 - Vulnerable groups
 - Young users
- Strengthening social environment of users (e.g. parents, youth workers) and medical community (early recognition!)

Thank you very much for your attention

Questions or get in touch?

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- Met de plaatsing van lachgas op lijst II bij de Opiumwet worden bepaalde handelingen met lachgas – zoals het binnen of buiten het grondgebied van Nederland brengen, bereiden, bewerken, verwerken, verkopen, afleveren, verstrekken, vervoeren, aanwezig hebben en vervaardigen – strafbaar.