



December 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

Over the past year, many of my Headteacher colleagues have reported an increase in the number of young people using vapes and taking nitrous oxide. Sadly, we are also experiencing this at Presdales School. Whilst I do not believe it is widespread, there are a small number of young people who have been experimenting with these substances inside and outside of school.

I am writing to offer advice to parents, as many of you, including myself as a parent, may not know what nitrous oxide is, the paraphernalia associated with it and the dangers that come with taking it.

Nitrous Oxide, commonly known as 'laughing gas/balloons/whippits/hippie crack/noz/chargers' is a colourless gas that people usually inhale via a balloon. It comes in a small silver canister, as shown below:



The end of the canister is opened, the gas is transferred to the balloon and then inhaled. Inhaling nitrous oxide directly from the canister is very dangerous because the gas is under such high pressure. It can cause a spasm of the throat muscle and stop a person breathing. A 'cracker' is used to open the canister. These are small metal cylinders, which sometimes look like a small torch.



Nitrous oxide is often taken in combination with other drugs, so its effect can be unpredictable, as it depends on what other drugs are being taken with it. If too much nitrous oxide is taken there is a risk of falling unconscious and/or suffocating from the lack of oxygen. People have died this way. Heavy regular use of nitrous oxide can lead to a deficiency of vitamin B12 and to a form of anaemia. Severe B12 deficiency can lead to serious nerve damage, causing tingling and numbness in the fingers and toes. This can be very painful and make walking difficult. Regular use can stop you forming white blood cells properly. This is a psychoactive drug and is covered by the 2016 Psychoactive Substances Act, which means it's illegal to give away or sell. Supply and production can lead to a 7-year prison sentence, an unlimited fine or both.

Many of you will be familiar with the term 'County Lines', a term used to describe drug gangs from big cities expanding their operations to smaller towns, often exploiting children and vulnerable people to sell drugs. One way of doing this is to entice young people in by giving away, or selling cheaply, drugs such as nitrous oxide. The

young person is then in the dealer's debt. The dangers of young people meeting up with people they do not know to purchase these items is obvious to see.

Whilst 'vaping' is a culturally accepted alternative to smoking, we have reservations about anyone using them, in particular young people. Recent news stories in the national press have highlighted the potential dangers of using a vape. One of our major concerns is that young people are using a vape without any knowledge of what the substance in the vape actually is.

At school, we have provided drugs education through PSHE, assemblies and form time, and will continue to do so. I would ask that you have an open and honest conversation with your own children about their exposure to these substances, as this is not going to go away. We want young people to understand the dangers that come with taking such substances and to consider whether these dangers are worth the perceived 'benefits' of taking them.

Another issue that is coming to the fore in schools is students having access to multiple mobile phones. When a new mobile phone is purchased, the old phone often goes in a drawer as a reserve. These phones can be used on Wi-Fi only to access the internet, so no data contract is needed. When a parent confiscates their child's phone, they are unaware that their child can still be using an old phone to access Instagram, Snap chat and other similar sites.

I have not written this letter with the intention of alarming parents, but more to help and support us all by sharing information on the pressures that young people are facing, and how we can help them.

Students and parents need to be aware that our school behaviour policy, which can be found on the school website, is very clear about the actions we will take if students bring or consume any of these items on site, especially if they provide them for other students.

If you would like any support in having conversations about this with your children, or with any other issue, then please contact us at school and we will do all we can to help. Please find below links that you may find useful:

<https://www.talktofrank.com/>

(UK site with information about all drugs)

AF-DASH - Adolescent and Families Drug and Alcohol Service for Hertfordshire  
01992 531917, text 07770 537227, email: [AFDASH@hpft.nhs.uk](mailto:AFDASH@hpft.nhs.uk)

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/what-parents-need-to-know-about-vaping-4154189>

(US article, but relevant information about vaping)

Yours sincerely



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