LegitScript

GUIDE

Top 10 Problematic Products for 2026

Contents

Introduction

Trends around problematic products online are as unpredictable as fashion. Some are new, some are old but new again, and some are timeless. One thing, however, is for certain: the ecosystem is in a state of constant change.

The trends driven by social media and the news can spark demand for illicit and violative products faster than risk & compliance and trust & safety teams can keep up. For this reason, it's important to stay abreast of consumer behavior to understand the threat that new (or newly popular) products can pose.

In this guide, we look at problematic products that we observe trending based on our work monitoring billions of data points across merchant portfolios, e-commerce marketplaces, social media content, and more. We'll explain what these products are, what makes them problematic, and how you can more easily spot them.

Read the guide and then learn more about LegitScript's risk management solutions, including Merchant Risk Solutions for payments companies and Platform Risk Solutions for online platforms.

1. 7-OH

What It Is

7-OH is a naturally occurring substance in the kratom plant (*Mitragyna speciosa*) that offers opioid-like effects similar to fentanyl and morphine. In kratom, 7-OH appears in only trace amounts, but new products contain "enhanced" or concentrated amounts of 7-OH intended to generate a stronger effect on users. The Food and Drug Administration has said that products with enhanced amounts of 7-OH are likely synthetically derived through oxidate chemical conversion of mitragynine isolates or kratom extracts.

7-OH products are widely available online and are commonly sold in gas stations, convenience stores, cannabis stores, and vape shops. They come in the form of chewables, sublingual tablets, gummies, drink mixes, shots, and more. 7-OH is also sometimes called **synthetic kratom**.

What Makes It Problematic

7-OH products are novel potent opioid products that have not been proven safe or effective for any use. According to the FDA, 7-OH has the potential for abuse because of its ability to bind to opioid receptors. Public health agencies across the country have reported overdoses, in some cases fatal.

There are no FDA-approved 7-OH drugs, and 7-OH is not lawful in dietary supplements or in conventional foods. The administration has issued warning letters to many companies for illegally distributing products containing 7-OH.

What to Watch Out For

7-OH products can take a variety of forms, so it's important to read the listing description or the product label. Labels may list it as:

- 7-hydroxymitragynine
- 7-OH-mitragynine
- 7-OHMG
- 7-OHMZ
- 7-Hydroxy
- 7-HMG
- 7

It is often marketed as "kratom extract," "enhanced kratom," or "synthetic kratom." Sellers may also sell other psychoactive products such as traditional kratom and cannabis.

Learn more about 7-OH in the FDA's recent report.

2. Unauthorized Peptides

What They Are

Peptides are short chains of amino acids that act as hormones, signaling molecules, and building blocks depending on their sequence and length. Some peptides such as insulin are naturally produced by the body, whereas others appear in the foods that we eat.

Peptides are also synthesized in labs for research or medical use. There are FDA-approved peptide-based drugs to address bacterial infections, prostate cancer, HIV infections, cystic fibrosis, diabetes, osteoporosis, and much more. Peptide drugs have garnered intense public interest in recent years with the advent of **semaglutide and other peptide-based GLP-1 drugs**, which are used to treat type 2 diabetes and obesity.

Additionally, peptides are often included in cosmetics and supplements for their potential health and cosmetic benefits such as skin rejuvenation, joint function, and muscle recovery. However, the efficacy of peptides for these purposes lacks substantial evidence.

What Makes Them Problematic

The status of a peptide depends on what the peptide is, how it's being used, how it's being marketed, and whether regulatory approval exists. LegitScript sees many synthetic peptides being sold online as "research chemicals" but are actually intended for human consumption. These products are unapproved because they **have not undergone proper FDA vetting and approval**.

The types of unapproved peptides LegitScript typically sees marketed online are used for one of the following purposes:

- Bodybuilding, muscle growth, and sports performance
- Weight loss
- Tanning
- Sexual enhancement
- Anti-aging and injury recovery

Some of these unapproved peptides have been linked to cancer and other serious diseases.

What to Watch Out For

Since there are many legitimate laboratories synthesizing and studying peptides, it's important to **recognize the risk factors** for merchants engaged in the illegal sale of unapproved peptides.

Here are some of the most common red flags:

- **"For Research Use Only."** Merchants offering research chemicals that prominently state that their products are not intended for human consumption may, perhaps counterintuitively, be more likely to be engaged in unapproved peptide sales.

- **Insufficient Safeguards.** Check the merchant's website or seller page to see what safeguards are in place to prevent the sale of peptides to individuals for personal use, such as requiring buyers to provide proof that they are professional researchers.

- **Known Problematic Peptides.** Know the names of peptides most commonly sold for unapproved human consumption such as Melanontan 2, tesamorelin, CJC-1295, BPC-157, and GHRPs.

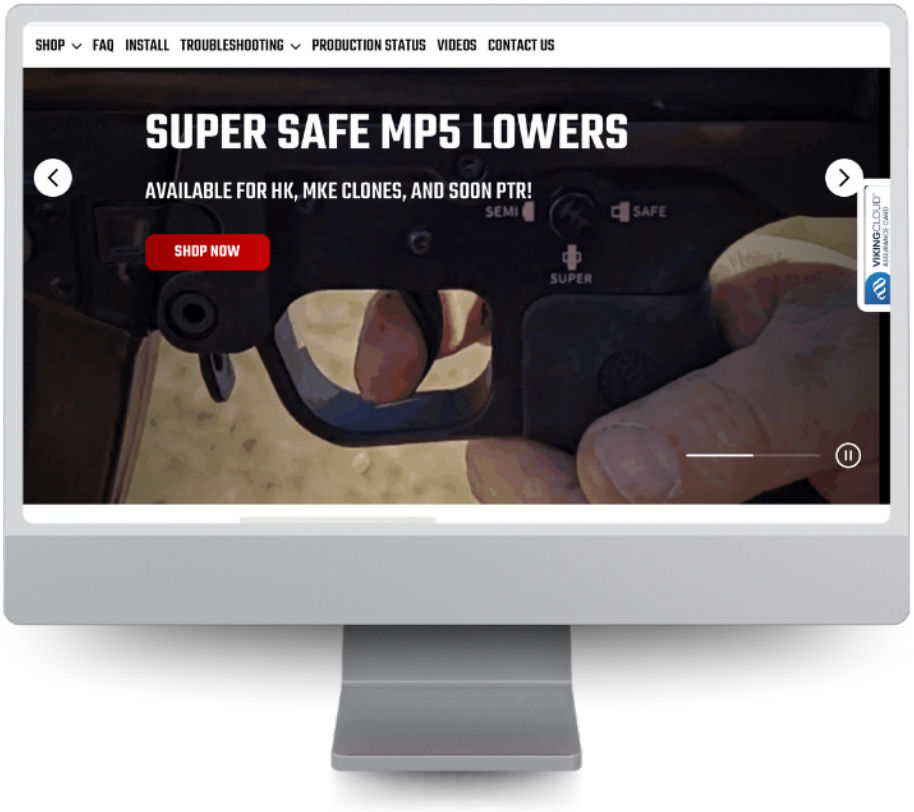
3. Forced Reset Triggers (FRTs)

What They Are

Firearms makers have created a variety of innovative trigger mechanisms that affect the performance of firearms. One of these is the forced reset trigger (FRT), which can dramatically increase the rate of fire but does not convert the firearm into fully automatic operation.

With a standard semi-automatic trigger, the shooter pulls the trigger to fire a round, and then manually releases the trigger, which resets the firing mechanism to prepare it for another shot. FRTs, however, use a modified trigger group that immediately forces the trigger into the reset position with the force of the weapon's cycling, which allows the user to make quicker consecutive trigger pulls, substantially augmenting the rate of fire.

Because the shooter must pull the trigger again after each forced reset, FRT-enhanced firearms still technically fall within the bounds of traditional semi-automatic function, but in practice achieve rates of fire that are comparable to automatic weapons.



What Makes Them Problematic

There have been some initial efforts at the federal level to regulate forced reset triggers as machine guns under the National Firearms Act. However, at the direction of the Trump administration, the Department of Justice settled a lawsuit in 2025 that allowed the patent holder of the FRT trigger to continue making devices for semi-automatic rifles as long as it agreed not to develop one for pistols and to enforce its patent rights against other manufacturers.

Although the federal government may lack restrictions on FRTs, many states have rapid fire device laws that, in some instances, make it a felony to ship these devices within their jurisdictions. There are also federal import laws against shipping armaments that may include these devices from overseas manufacturers such as China.

Furthermore, many manufacturers not involved in the 2025 federal lawsuit settlement are creating FRTs for pistols, which may cause reputational harm and potentially legal liability for companies that help to facilitate their sales. The simplicity of the design makes it possible for "mom and pop" stores and even private citizens to manufacture FRTs through 3D printing and simple CNC machining.

What to Watch Out For

Manufacturers and sellers of FRTs are easy to spot because their offerings are generally not hidden or obfuscated. Merchants who may face heightened scrutiny are ones who lack shipping safeguards and allow shipping to states that restrict FRTs such as California, New York, Oregon, Illinois, and Massachusetts.

Other high-risk merchants to watch out for include ones offering instructions for download on manufacturing FRTs at home using a 3D printer.

4. Skin-lightening Products

What They Are

Skin lightening products, which typically come in the forms of creams, lotions, and soaps, are popular throughout the world with mostly female consumers. A simple search for "skin lightening cream" yields thousands of results for cosmetic products that can be easily purchased on e-market platforms.

Although skin lightening is nothing new, these products are once again top of mind for regulators and card brands after a spate of high profile incidents. A global mercury watchdog recently tested eight skin-lightening products purchased on a major e-commerce platform and found that seven of them had mercury concentrations thousands of times higher than the legal limit. In New York, the attorney general ordered three New York companies to stop selling skin-lightening creams known to contain unlawful and dangerous levels of mercury. And the FDA has sent numerous warning letters to companies offering these products with unapproved ingredients.

What Makes Them Problematic

Although skin-lightening products are often marketed as being made from natural ingredients, that isn't always the case, and it doesn't guarantee they are approved or safe. Regulatory authorities often conduct testing on these products and find them to contain dangerous ingredients, the most common of which are:

Mercury

Exposure to mercury can cause permanent damage to the brain and kidneys, skin rashes, skin discoloration and scarring, and a reduction in the skin's resistance to bacterial and fungal infections. Furthermore, the FDA states that consumers using products containing mercury can expose family members through skin contact or mercury vapor, putting them at risk.

Hydroquinone

Many skin lightening products also often contain high concentrations of hydroquinone. Historically, drug products containing no more than 2% hydroquinone were permitted to be sold over the counter in the United States, but OTC monograph reform in 2020 eliminated the non-final skin bleaching monograph. FDA approval is now required for all hydroquinone products before they may be sold in the US. Currently, there are only a few FDA-approved drug products containing hydroquinone, and they are only available with a prescription. Regulators warn that the use of these products can put users at risk of leukoderma (depigmentation), ochronosis (hyperpigmentation), allergic contact dermatitis, and possibly cancer.

Clobetasol Propionate

Clobetasol propionate is a topical corticosteroid that's commonly used to treat inflammation and irritation on the skin. Products containing clobetasol generally require a prescription in the United States and are meant to be used short term only. Using clobetasol for an extended time can cause the skin to become thinner and create stretch marks. Cushing's syndrome has also been reported as a result of prolonged use of topical clobetasol products. Furthermore, a large amount of clobetasol passing through the skin can shut down the adrenal glands, which can lead to nausea, vomiting, fever, low blood pressure, heart attack, and even death because the body cannot appropriately respond to stress or illness.

What to Watch Out For

Checking the ingredient list of any skin-lightening product is a good first step to see if it contains harmful or unapproved ingredients. However, problematic ingredients in cosmetics aren't always readily apparent, and many skin-lightening products claim to use only natural ingredients. For this reason, it's important to track worldwide regulatory notices (or use LegitScript's database lookups) to see which products have been called out by regulators.

Top brands that have been cited by regulators include:

- Goree Beauty Cream
- Golden Pearl Beauty Cream
- Arche Pearl Cream Tibet Snow
- Kojie San Skin Lightening Cream
- Papaya Whitening and Anti-Freckle Cream

Download our cosmetics guide for more information related to risks that come with cosmetic products.

5. Mad Honey

What It Is

"Mad honey" is honey that contains natural toxins occurring as a result of the type of nectar and pollen collected by bees. One of the most common toxins is grayanotoxin, which is found in rhododendron plants.

Mad honey is often consumed intentionally. It has been used for many purposes, including as an aphrodisiac, as a remedy for gastrointestinal disorders, and as a treatment for hypertension. However, a number of recent high-profile poisoning incidents have had regulators more carefully scrutinizing these products.

What Makes It Problematic

Because it contains a toxin, mad honey can pose a threat to consumer health. According to scientists, "[g]rayanotoxin acts on sodium ion channels and muscarinic receptors, leading to cardiac disorders … and respiratory depression. Patients may also exhibit any one symptom out of or combination of dizziness, blurred vision, diplopia, nausea, vomiting, vertigo, headache, sweating/excessive perspiration, extremity paresthesia, impaired consciousness, convulsion, hypersalivation, ataxia, inability to stand, and general weakness."

The FDA monitors foods posing an elevated risk for natural toxins, including honey, vegetables, fruits, and plants, to keep them out of the food supply.

Furthermore, many medicinal honey products are sold with undisclosed ingredients.

What to Watch Out For

Products containing mad honey are usually easy to spot because their labels and packaging clearly state what it is and typically describe its intended use for its psychoactive properties. These products typically come from (or claim to come from) Nepal or Turkey.

Pay special attention to products claiming to treat or cure diseases, as these may be more likely to draw regulatory scrutiny.

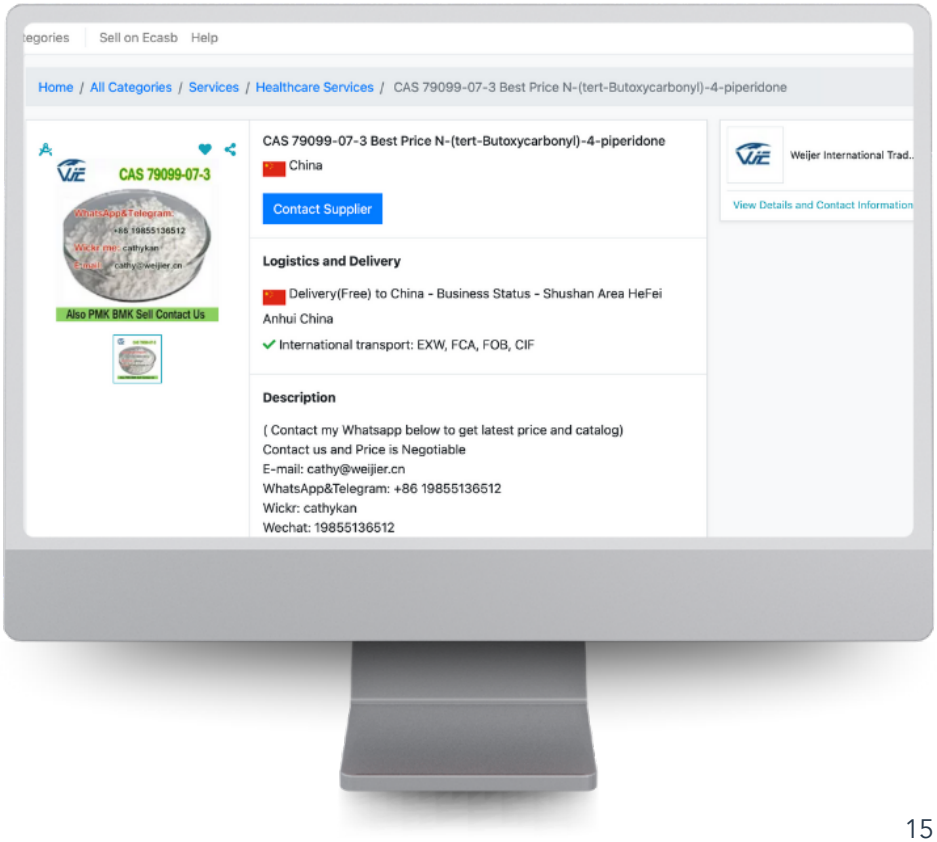
6. Precursor Chemicals

What They Are

Precursor chemicals are substances that are essential or important to the manufacture of drugs, including fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is also an approved drug in a number of global jurisdictions. The most common known and important fentanyl precursors include 4-anilino-N-phenethylpiperidine (ANPP) and N-Phenethyl-4-piperidone (NPP). Common illicit drugs using precursor chemicals include methamphetamine and MDMA.

Because precursor chemicals can have legitimate and illegitimate uses, the substances are not generally banned by regulatory authorities, but are often subject to additional, sometimes significant, regulatory scrutiny such as government reporting and registration requirements. Due to the strict requirements imposed on sellers by most countries, chemicals offered through merchant websites and online platforms are unlikely to be sold in a legally compliant manner by legitimate parties.

Given the regulation of precursors such as ANPP and NPP, bad actors have worked to create new fentanyl precursors. The UN's International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) maintains a list of fentanyl-related substances with no known legitimate uses, and as of 2021, the list has more than 150 entries.



How They Are Regulated

The United Nations (UN) Convention against Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 (1988 Convention) provides the basis of global precursor regulation adopted by most jurisdictions worldwide with the actual regulatory requirements set by individual jurisdictions. The US generally adopts the 1988 Convention framework. Since the incorporation of precursor chemical regulation under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA), the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has added a number of chemicals to the original list and currently regulates about 50 substances as Listed Chemicals. Some Listed Chemicals are only regulated above certain quantities and in other specific instances.

The US DEA also maintains a Special Surveillance List (SSL) which includes Listed Chemicals and other chemicals which are commonly used in illicit drug production, as well as drug manufacturing equipment. Under the provision of the list, which was originally created in the 1990s to combat methamphetamine production, a seller of a product listed in the SSL who sells the product with "reckless disregard" of its potential illegal use may face a fine of up to $250,000.

In recent years, the Department of Justice has brought charges against numerous China-based chemical manufacturing companies for their role in the sale and distribution of opioid and methamphetamine precursors.

What to Watch Out For

Drug precursors are prevalent on the internet, with bad actors often using social media to sell controlled or highly regulated substances. Sellers will typically market their products online but then move to a secure messaging platform such as WhatsApp or Telegram to complete a sale.

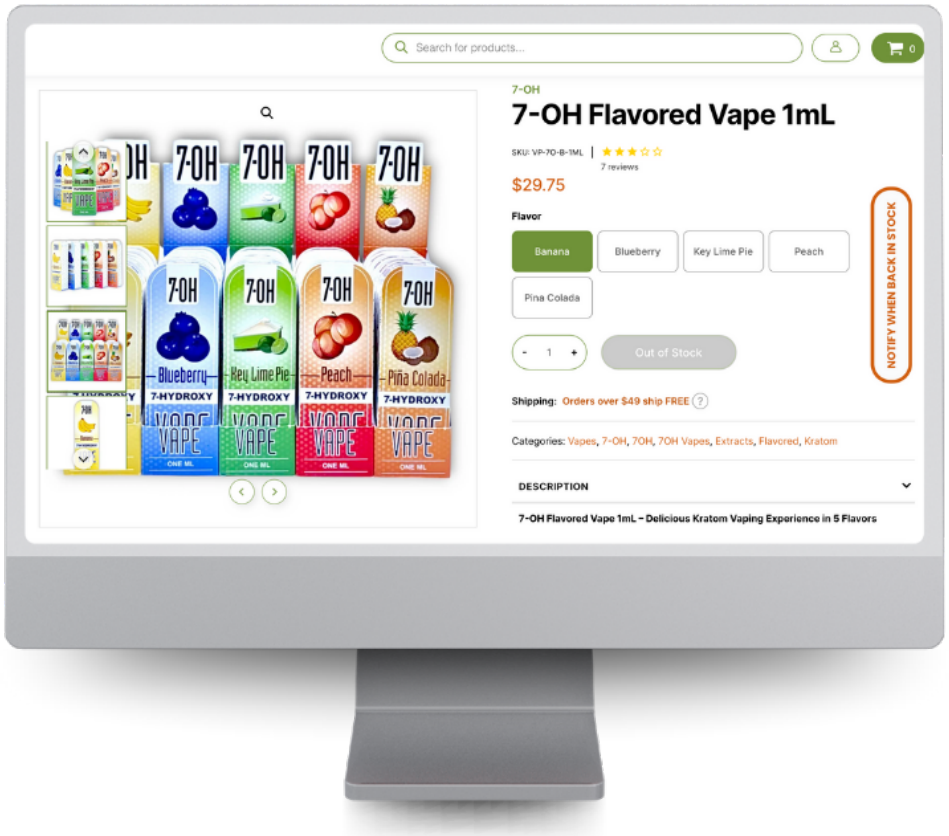
To avoid detection, sellers often use alternate names or spellings of substances to evade keyword detection efforts. Talk to a LegitScript expert to learn more about the common slang and keywords we watch out for. Another common tactic has been the use of Chemical Abstract Service (CAS) numbers rather than chemical names. As CAS numbers are unique to each chemical substance, and chemicals may often be written in different ways, this is an easy way to signal to potential buyers which substances are for sale, while also evading platforms' detection efforts.

7. Illegal Vaping Products

What They Are

According to the World Health Organization, the world is smoking less, but new nicotine products are on the rise. More than 100 million people worldwide are now vaping, including at least 86 million adults and 15 million adolescents.

As vaping's popularity grows, various types of illegal vape products continue to flood the market, drawing intense scrutiny from the FDA. Recent findings from the DEA show that large portions of e-cigarette sales involve illegal and addictive substances such as synthetic marijuana, synthetic cathinones, synthetic opiates, medical sedatives, and 7-OH ("synthetic kratom").



What Makes Them Problematic

There is already worldwide concern that vaping of tobacco products may be just as harmful as smoking. The influx of synthetic and psychoactive substances on the e-cigarette market further compounds the health risks to consumers. Anecdotally, many chronic vapers have reported lung injury related to the habit.

What makes these products especially problematic is that they often appeal to youth by featuring bright packaging and imagery inspired by popular cereals, candies, and snacks. Companies helping to facilitate the sale of illegal vaping products to adolescents may face intense regulatory and card network scrutiny. Tackling the youth vaping crisis continues to be a major enforcement priority for the FDA. Furthermore, states are passing increasingly strict laws to restrict vaping, especially in the context of youth.

What to Watch Out For

The online sale of e-cigarettes is often restricted by many payment service providers and online platforms due to the potential for sale to underage consumers and associated reputational risks. For that reason, online sellers may resort to using transaction laundering to process payments or "bundling" their illicit product together with innocuous products to obfuscate the sale.

Any merchant or seller offering vaping products warrants scrutiny, but especially those marketing products that may appeal to youth, including flavored tobacco products and products with youth-oriented packaging such as bright colors or cartoon characters.

8. Counterfeit Supplements

What They Are

The e-commerce market for supplements continues to grow, with an estimated compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8% from now through 2030. With more consumers buying their supplements online, LegitScript has observed bad actors increasingly using e-commerce marketplaces, merchant websites, and social media to market and sell counterfeit versions of popular supplement brands. The relative anonymity and global reach of the internet make it easier to perpetuate this kind of fraud online.

Almost any kind of supplement is at risk of being counterfeited: workout supplements, pet supplements, even nutritional supplements claiming to be halal. In India, police busted a large fake supplements racket that was manufacturing counterfeit protein powder, fish oil capsules, and other supplements with labels that claimed the products were made in the US or Japan.

What Makes Them Problematic

Counterfeit supplements pose a risk to public health because the products may not contain the ingredients they claim to have and may instead contain harmful ingredients. In fact, some counterfeit supplements have been found to contain active pharmaceutical ingredients, which can pose a danger when ingested unknowingly.

The FDA regulates both dietary supplements and the ingredients contained in them. Supplements found to be counterfeit can be subject to alerts and recall notices. Companies helping to facilitate the sales of the products can be subject to regulatory scrutiny and reputational harm.

What to Watch Out For

Counterfeit products can be difficult to spot, though labels may have misspellings and other irregularities that set them apart from the genuine products. Supplements that are counterfeit are often priced much lower than their genuine counterparts.

If a third-party seller is distributing a supplement brand, consider asking for verification of the commercial relationship between the distributor and the manufacturer/brand.

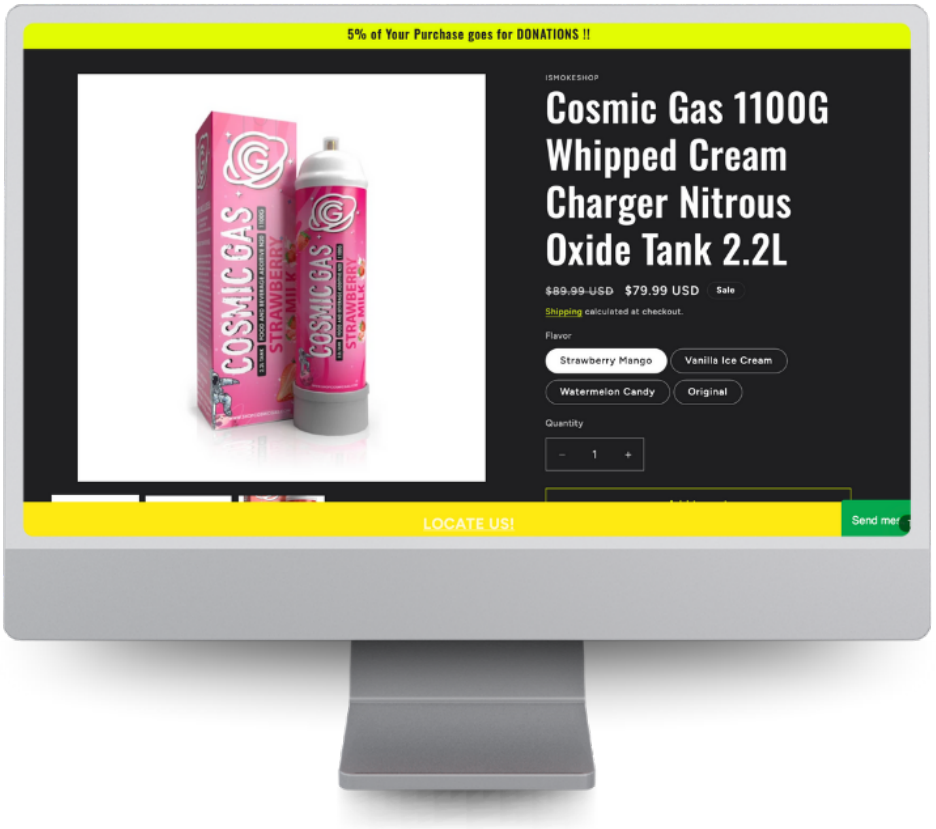
9. Nitrous Oxide

What It Is

Nitrous oxide, a colorless and odorless gas, is becoming increasingly popular around the world as a party drug that goes by many names: "laughing gas," "hippy crack," and "whippets," among others. LegitScript has noticed a growing trend of nitrous oxide appearing on websites and e-commerce platforms, being marketed in ways that indicate use for recreational purposes.

When used for recreation, nitrous oxide is often inhaled via a balloon, typically in combination with a "cracker," a canister that holds the gas cartridge. It offers an intense but short-lived high causing euphoric feelings, hallucinations, and laughter (hence the name "laughing gas").

What makes monitoring for nitrous oxide complex is that it has many legitimate uses. For example, it is well known as a medical anesthetic. In food preparation, it acts as a propellant in pressurized cans, such as whipped cream, and also serves as a preservative to keep these food products from going rancid. Because of its widespread applications, it can be difficult to know whether a merchant is selling nitrous oxide for legitimate or illegitimate purposes.



What Makes It Problematic

The FDA has recently warned about the risks of nitrous oxide abuse, including vomiting, paranoia, unconsciousness, a vitamin B12 deficiency, nerve damage, and even death.

Nitrous oxide is regulated as a "designated medical gas" (and therefore as a drug) by the Food and Drug Administration under the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDCA). Under the FDCA, it is a prohibited act to bring "misbranded drugs into interstate commerce." This can be prosecuted as a federal misdemeanor and is punishable by imprisonment or a fine. There are precedents for law enforcement arresting people who allegedly sold nitrous oxide for recreational use on misdemeanor charges of misbranding a drug.

Since nitrous oxide is not classified as a controlled substance, many states — such as Connecticut, Florida, and Arizona — have passed legislation to regulate abuse, possession, sale, and distribution of nitrous oxide. Examples of legislation include prohibition of possession, distribution, or sale of nitrous oxide (to a minor) and prohibition of inhaling of nitrous oxide for recreational purposes. Violation is often prosecuted as a misdemeanor and penalties range from fines to jail time.

What to Watch Out For

The following factors may indicate that nitrous oxide is being sold for recreational purposes on a merchant's website or e-commerce platform:

- The product is marketed using slang such as "laughing gas," "hippy crack," and "whippets."
- The merchant sells balloons and crackers, which are common accessories for recreational use.
- The seller ships to (or ships from) a jurisdiction in which nitrous oxide is regulated.

According to the FDA, common brand names used for recreational purposes include:

- Baking Bad
- Cloud 9ine
- Cosmic Gas
- Euro Gas
- ExoticWhip
- FastGas
- Galaxy Gas
- Goo Sticks
- HOTWHIP
- InfusionMax
- MassGass
- Miami Magic
- Monster Gas
- NITROX
- Whip-it!

10. Nitazenes

What They Are

Nitazenes, also known as benzimidazole-opioids, are a group of synthetic substances that are increasingly being trafficked and abused for their opioid-like effects such as euphoria, sedation, and pain relief. These substances were first developed in the 1950s but have more recently become a target of abuse as regulators and enforcement agencies attempt to crack down on other opioids and opioid-like products.

According to drug researchers, more than a dozen different nitazene analogues have been identified around the world since 2024, and new forms are continually being identified. They can take the form of powder or tablets, which are sometimes masked as other drugs. Nitazenes have no approved medical use.

Fake oxycodone tablets containing metonitazene, seized in Sweden in 2023. Source: Swedish Customs Laboratory.

What Makes Them Problematic

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, nitazenes are abused for psychoactive effects that are similar to schedule I opioids such as heroin. And, in fact, the DEA may treat nitazenes as schedule I controlled substance analogues for the purpose of federal law. The population most likely to abuse nitazenes are those already abusing heroin or synthetic opioid substances.

Nitazenes pose similar overdose dangers to other synthetic opioids, including coma and respiratory failure leading to death. Like other opioids, nitazenes pose an extreme risk of dependence.

What to Watch Out For

Although e-commerce marketplaces and payment service providers are increasingly diligent about keeping opioid products off their platforms and out of their portfolios, opioids like nitazenes are still readily available on the internet according to the FDA's recent Online Opioid Summit.

Many online sellers market their products in forums or on social media and then conduct sales off-platform through secure messaging apps. Payment service providers should be vigilant about the prospect of transaction laundering being employed to process payments for illicit opioids.

Common nitazenes include:

- Butonitazene
- Clonitazene
- Etonitazene
- Isotonitazene
- Metonitazene
- Protonitazene

Take the Next Step

Want to find out how LegitScript can help your business reduce regulatory risk, avoid fines, and keep your customers safe? Reach out to us to learn how our risk solutions and policy expertise can help you grow your business with confidence.

About LegitScript

At LegitScript, we are committed to making the internet and payment ecosystems safer and more transparent. LegitScript experts proactively track high-risk trends to help keep our partners in compliance and reduce the risk of regulatory scrutiny and expensive card network fines. Our best-in-class risk management solutions identify and flag high-risk merchants, seller listings, and online ads to help our clients quickly and accurately remove problematic content from their platforms and portfolios.

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