

Girl in nitrogen cocktail horror 'is a victim' of drinks industry': Teenager had her stomach removed

- **Gaby Scanlon had been drinking at a bar in Lancaster to celebrate her 18th birthday when she was left feeling breathless**
- **She was taken to Lancaster Royal Infirmary where she diagnosed with a perforated stomach**
- **Liquid nitrogen is added to a cocktail to chill and create a smoke effect**
- **Lancashire Police: Bar has now stopped serving cocktail**

By Jaya Narain & Nazia Parween



Emergency surgery: Gaby Scanlon was celebrating her 18th birthday when she fell ill

A teenage girl who had her stomach removed and 'nearly died' after drinking a cocktail containing liquid nitrogen was the victim of a 'irresponsible alcohol industry,' according to senior health bosses.

Gaby Scanlon had been drinking with friends at a wine bar to celebrate her 18th birthday when she was bought two 'Nitro Jagermeister' cocktails.

She downed both drinks in quick succession and very quickly felt unwell.

The A-level student became very breathless and then doubled over with 'horrendous stomach pains' before an ambulance was called.

The teenager was rushed to hospital where doctors diagnosed a perforated stomach.

Suffering intense pain, she was rushed into theatre where surgeons were forced to remove most of her stomach to save her life.

The student was said to be 'doing well' after the emergency operation but is set to remain in hospital for some time and will face specialist medical treatment for the rest of her life.

At the weekend the teenager was apparently well enough last night to write on Twitter: 'Maybe stay off the liquid nitrogen' is not a f***** funny thing to say to me.' She also tweeted: 'I nearly died.'

Both tweets were later removed from the website.

But last night Dr John Ashton, director of public health for Cumbria, said she was a victim of a dangerous gimmick used to sell more alcohol.

He said: 'This girl is the victim of an irresponsible alcohol industry that's now competing on gimmicks.

'People should not be playing chemistry in public houses. This is a very, very cold substance and it is similar to subjecting your oesophagus and stomach to frost bite.



Cooling cocktail: Liquid nitrogen is used in some luxury cocktails and is known for freezing everything it comes into contact with

'As this case highlights there are major safety implications and it is time there was better regulation put in place to prevent things like this dreadful incident happening again.'

He said a total ban would only lead to increased demand for the dangerous cocktails but said there should be 'stringent regulation.'

Consultant gastroenterologists say the teenager will face a lifetime of specialist medical treatment in order to live a normal life. As well as being unable to digest certain things Miss Scanlon will have to avoid some sugary foods and drinks and have regular vitamin injections.



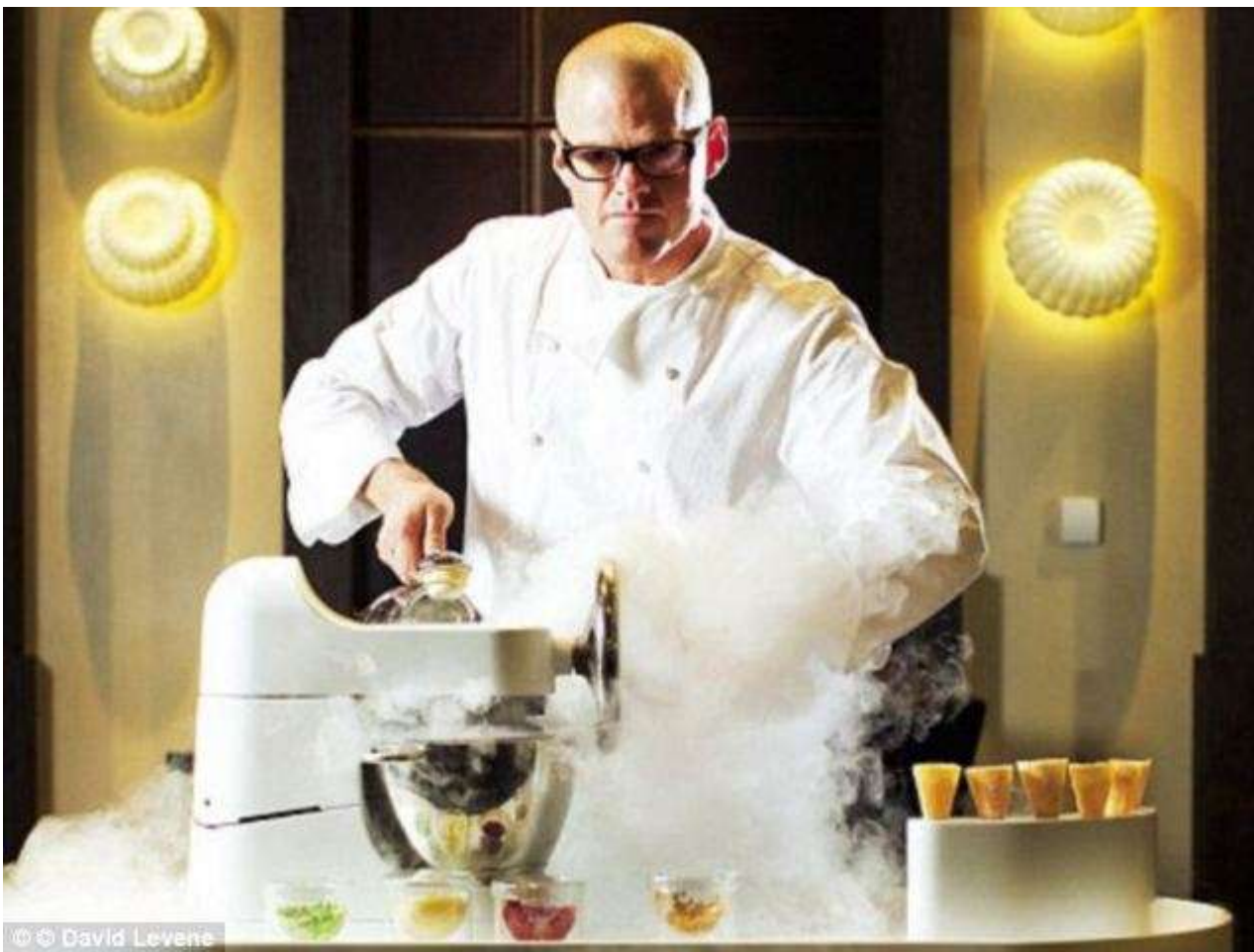
Investigation: Lancashire Police said the Oscars wine bar have ceased selling the liquid nitrogen cocktail

Popularised by celebrity chef, Heston Blumenthal, liquid nitrogen - which vapourises at -196°C - has been increasingly used in recent years in the preparation of drinks.

It is used to chill glasses and is a crowd-pleaser thanks to the dramatic-looking water vapour it releases at room temperature. But it is highly dangerous and can cause very serious cold burns if it comes into contact with skin or tissue and should never be ingested.

It is believed the cocktails drunk by the Miss Scanlon still contained drops of the liquid nitrogen which then caused horrendous burns to her stomach.

Last night her mother Lisa Hensall, 38, was said to be too upset about the incident to speak but her stepfather Ian Henshall, 40, said the family were hoping for a quick recovery.



Trendy: TV chef Heston Blumenthal has pioneered the use of liquid nitrogen in his restaurants including making ice-cream using it

Mr Henshall said: 'She is our main concern at the moment and we are just concentrating on her getting better.'

Dr Ashton said it was time the Government brought in better regulation of the drinks industry to stop such tragic incidents. He said: 'It is shocking that a teenage girl goes out to celebrate her 18th birthday and ends up in intensive care with life-changing injuries.'

'The alcohol industry uses these types of gimmicks to make alcoholic drinks more enticing - yet staff can use liquid nitrogen without any proper training.'

HOW LIQUID NITROGEN CAN CAUSE HORRIFIC DAMAGE TO THE BODY

Liquid nitrogen is formed by cooling down the harmless gas nitrogen to such a low temperature that it becomes liquid.

It is intensely cold (-196°C) and if not used properly can cause frostbite or cryogenic burns when it comes into contact with living tissue.

Professor Peter Barham, of the University of Bristol's School of Physics, said: 'As with any very hot or very cold liquid proper safety measures must be taken - just as no-one would drink boiling water or oil or pour it over themselves, so no-one should ingest liquid nitrogen.'

'Liquid nitrogen can be used safely in the preparation of foods.'

However, since it is not safe to ingest liquid nitrogen due care must be taken to ensure that the liquid has all evaporated before serving any food or drink that was prepared with liquid nitrogen.'

In fact, liquid nitrogen is used in cryotherapy medical treatment to burn away skin abnormalities, such as warts.

But it will have the same effect if consumed, burning internal tissue in the stomach.

Where the burn causes a hole or perforation in the stomach wall it will allow gastric acid to leak into the abdominal cavity, which can be fatal.

This is a surgical emergency and in cases where the damage can't be repaired, the stomach will have to be removed.

The oesophagus, the muscular tube that transports the food, is connected directly to the small bowel.

In the short term a feeding tube may be necessary.

But surprisingly, the body soon adapts to digesting food without a stomach, where the food is normally stored and mixed during the initial phase of digestion.

The small intestine will act more like a stomach over time and keep food there for longer while it is broken down.

Most normal foods can be eaten after a total gastrectomy - whole stomach removal - but in smaller portions and more frequently. The operation is most often performed in cancer patients.

Doctors may advise avoiding meals made up of foods high in added sugar.

This is because food will be entering the bowel rapidly and sugar-laden foods exacerbate the problem, potentially causing a transitory drop in blood pressure and unpleasant symptoms such as feeling dizzy or faint.

People without a stomach need to have regular injections of vitamin B12 as the stomach controls its absorption and deficiency can lead to anaemia.

'These things are allowed to continue in this country because of the Government's lack of control over the drinks industry.

'Essentially it amounts to a form of cowardice because there are drinks industry interests in every constituency and the Government is worried about repercussions.'

He said it was time dangerous substances like liquid nitrogen formed part of the licensing application with staff being properly trained to handle it.

The incident happened last Thursday when Miss Scanlon went out to Oscar's winebar in Lancaster with friends to celebrate her 18th birthday.

Shortly before 11pm she was bought two 'Nitro Jagermeister' cocktails costing £8.95 and she downed them both with the space of a few minutes.

She very quickly began to complain of a horrific pain in her stomach and severe breathlessness and was rushed to Lancaster Royal Infirmary by paramedics.

The management of the wine bar has stopped all liquid nitrogen cocktails and were said to be 'tremendously concerned' for the teenager.

The sixth-form student lives with her family in a quiet cul-de-sac in a semi-detached home on the outskirts of Lancaster in the village of Heysham.

Liz Nicholls, principal at Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy, says the teenager is one of their 'most hardworking and mature students'

She said: 'Our whole school community is shocked and upset at what has happened.'

'Our thoughts and prayers are with Gaby, her family and her friends who are obviously upset and distressed. We are pleased to hear that she is making better than expected progress.'

Coun Paul Aitchison, chairman of Lancaster City Council's Licensing Act Committee, said that he was at the same bar a few months ago and tried the Nitro Jagermeister drink.

Mr Aitchison, who at 20 is one of the country's youngest councillors, said: 'I heard about this and I was quite shocked because I have actually tried it myself.'

'I thought it sounded interesting, that's probably one of the draws. You assume the drinks served in licensed premises will be safe. I didn't have an adverse reaction to it. It was quite scary to think that it could have possibly happened to me.'

A number of witnesses at the wine bar were interviewed by police and the premises has stopped selling drinks containing the liquid gas.

A spokesman for Lancashire Police said: 'Medical opinion is that this would have proved fatal had the operation not been carried out urgently.'

'The investigation is still in its early stages and we are still interviewing witnesses to establish the full facts.'

The premises involved have fully co-operated with all agencies and have suspended drinks involving liquid nitrogen.'