# NHS alerted to A&E wait times after 24-year-old's death



**NHS Alerted to A&E Wait Times Following 24-Year-Old's Death**

Ellen Mercer, a 24-year-old student from Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, died in hospital on February 9 last year after losing feeling in her legs. Ellen had inhaled significant amounts of nitrous oxide, commonly known as "laughing gas," leading to a blood clot that proved fatal.

The business student was taken to Wexham Park Hospital in Slough but spent 24 hours in the emergency department without receiving a formal risk assessment for blood clots. The coroner, Heidi Connor from Berkshire, cited Ellen's use of nitrous oxide and subsequent immobility as key factors in her death. The coroner's report highlighted a significant delay in performing blood clot risk assessments, pointing out that existing NHS policies do not account for prolonged wait times in emergency departments.

Ellen's death has prompted a warning to NHS England and other relevant organizations. The coroner emphasized that current health service policies are unclear about when the 24-hour period for performing blood clot risk assessments should begin, suggesting it may neglect patients waiting in emergency areas. Consequently, NHS England and other bodies have 56 days to respond to these concerns.

Nitrous oxide, known for its euphoric effects, was classified as a Class C drug after this incident. Ellen's case underscores the potential dangers of laughing gas and the critical need for timely medical interventions in emergency care settings.