

New drugs entering Europe at 'unprecedented pace'

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New drugs are flooding the European market at an "unprecedented pace", the European drug monitoring centre and Europol warned in a joint report released in Portugal on Wednesday.

"New psychoactive substances are becoming widely available at an unprecedented pace," The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and [Drug Addiction](#) (EMCDDA) and the EU's law enforcement agency said.

They noted that last year they were officially notified of 49 new drugs, a record number for a single year, via the EU early-warning system (EWS) on new psychoactive substances, up from 24 in 2009 and 13 the previous year.

The new substances include synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones, synthetic derivatives of well-established drugs, as well as one plant-based substance.

Under the so-called 'Spice' phenomenon, 11 new synthetic [cannabinoids](#) were picked up in 2010, bringing the total number of these substances monitored by the EWS up to 27.

As a result, at least 16 [European countries](#) have taken legal action to ban or otherwise control 'Spice' products and related compounds.

In December, the EU also decided to ban the sale of the synthetic cathinone derivative, mephedrone, but 15 synthetic cathinone derivatives

were detected in 2010, the report said.

In view of the large number of new unregulated synthetic compounds marketed on the Internet as legal highs', the report also highlighted EMCDDA's monitoring of online shops selling these substances.

"While our [early-warning system](#) has recently upped its operational capacity to react rapidly to new substances and products identified, it currently lacks the ability to anticipate emerging threats," EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz said.

This, he added, could be done "by actively purchasing, synthesising and studying new compounds and by improving our capacity for investigative forensic analysis and research at European level".

The report, released ahead of the first international forum on new drugs opening here Wednesday, also warned that organised crime groups are increasingly active in producing and distributing drugs associated with ecstasy.

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