

EU urges 'legal highs' fight

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The European Commission on Tuesday urged member countries to coordinate their fight against "legal highs", the use of medical drugs and industrial chemicals for recreation which has killed many unwary thrill-seekers.

"Legal highs are a growing problem in Europe and it is young people who are most at risk," said Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding as she submitted a raft of proposed measures to bar access to getting high off of otherwise legitimate substances.

These psychoactive substances, intended as medicine or sometimes for use in the chemical industry, have become a fixture of European nightlife offering users the effect of cocaine or ecstasy from substances found in pharmacies or building sites.

According to a 2011 survey, on average five percent of young people in the EU have used such substances at least once in their life, with a peak of 16 percent in Ireland, and close to 10 percent in Poland, Latvia and Britain.

They can be deadly, or have lasting physical or [psychological effects](#) especially when mixed with alcohol, which they often are.

"For instance, the substance 5-IT (a stimulant) reportedly killed 24 people in four EU countries, in just five months, between April and August 2012," the Commission said.

4-MA, a sometime [diet pill](#) which imitates [amphetamines](#), was associated with 21 deaths in four EU countries in 2010-2012 alone, it added.

Reding said the number of new [psychoactive substances](#) detected in the EU had in fact tripled between 2009 and 2012.

About a fifth of them were originally designed for industry or research, including gamma-butyrolactone, a solvent used to remove glue.

"With a borderless internal market, we need common EU rules to tackle this problem," she said.

Reding said procedures to get these substances off the market needed to be speeded up, compared with the current two years.

Moreover, authorities should not be left faced with just two options—"either taking no action at EU level or imposing full market restrictions and criminal sanctions".

Jail sentences for traffickers needed to be toughened to at least one to three years, Reding added.

Nine substances have already been restricted from sale in the EU, with the deadly 5-IT to be added this year.

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