

New York declares war on synthetic cannabis

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New York declared war Tuesday on synthetic cannabis, otherwise known as K2, responsible for thousands of emergency-room visits this year alone and far more dangerous than ordinary marijuana.

Mayor Bill de Blasio signed into law three new bills designed to curb the use of the drug, manufactured in the United States from chemicals produced in China.

The new law would also impose tougher punishments on those who sell or manufacture the substance.

Convicted sellers will now face up to one year in prison, a \$5,000 fine and civil penalties of up to \$50,000. Grocers who sell them can lose their licences to sell cigarettes as well.

"K2 is a poison," de Blasio told reporters. "It was crucial, before this trend got any worse, to act decisively."

The new laws will take effect in 60 days time, but will not punish users, many of whom suffer from [mental health problems](#).

Synthetic cannabinoids are leaves sprayed with unpredictable and diverse chemical combinations that are either smoked or ingested.

The drugs go by a litany of other names including Spice, Green Giant and Caution, and produce side-effects that include tremor seizures, hallucinations and violent behavior.

New York Police Commissioner Bill Bratton said dozens of people have been arrested, and millions of packets of K2, as well as numerous ingredients destined for production, have been seized.

Since January alone, there have been more than 4,500 synthetic cannabinoid-related emergency department visits in New York, including more than 1,200 in July, authorities said.

To date there has been one death from the drug in the city.

Men make up around 90 percent of the visits. Patients have a median age of 37 and are disproportionately residents of homeless shelters and sufferers of a psychiatric illness.

Bratton said China is the principal source of the chemicals used to create K2. They are mixed in different formulas, usually trying to stay one step ahead of existing laws, he said.

"The manufacture of the K2 is usually done here in the United States where it's sprayed on leaves that look like marijuana... but the only source of the chemicals used in this is China," he told reporters.

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