

Illicit opioid trade up with restrictions on hydrocodone

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(HealthDay)—The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's 2014 ruling

to reschedule hydrocodone combination products coincided with an increase in illicit trading of opioids through online illicit markets (cryptomarkets), according to a study published online June 13 in *The BMJ*.

James Martin, Ph.D., from Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia, and colleagues examined the effect of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's 2014 ruling to reschedule hydrocodone combination products on the trade in opioids through cryptomarkets. Data were examined from 31 of the world's largest cryptomarkets.

The researchers found that after the schedule change there was an increase in the sale of [prescription opioids](#) through U.S. cryptomarkets, with no statistically significant changes in prescription sedative, prescription steroid, prescription stimulant, or illicit [opioid](#) sales. Sales of opioids through U.S. cryptomarkets represented 13.7 percent of all drug sales in July 2016, compared with a modelled estimate of 6.7 percent of all sales had the new schedule not been introduced. This corresponded to a yearly increase of 4 percent in the amount of trade that prescription opioids represent in the U.S. market; for comparable products or prescription opioids sold outside of the United States, there was no corresponding change. The change was first seen for sales, then later for product availability.

"The scheduling change in hydrocodone combination products coincided with a statistically significant, sustained increase in illicit trading of opioids through online U.S. cryptomarkets," the authors write.

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