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GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

## GOVERNOR CUOMO ANNOUNCES PASSAGE OF EMERGENCY REGULATIONS TARGETING THE SALE OF SYNTHETIC MARIJUANA

### *Tenfold Increase in Medical Emergencies from Synthetic Marijuana this Summer over Last Year*

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the passage of emergency Health Department regulations combatting the sale of synthetic cannabinoids in New York State. The tougher regulations expand the existing list of banned substances to include new chemical compounds that drug producers have been making since Governor Cuomo first targeted so-called synthetic marijuana in 2012. Today's actions are in response to a dramatic and dangerous increase in medical emergencies across New York State this summer.

"The evolution of synthetic drugs is an alarming public health risk – and we are on the front lines of the battle," Governor Cuomo said. "The state will continuously identify emerging compounds that put users in danger and aggressively chase down vendors in order to keep these drugs out of the hands of New Yorkers."

Between June 7 and August 1, New York State experienced a tenfold increase over the same times last year in emergency department visits (more than 2,300) and poison control center calls (more than 300) from adverse health effects due to synthetic marijuana. Nationally, there have been 15 related deaths reported to poison control centers during January through May 2015. No deaths have yet occurred in New York State.

The emergency measures add two additional classes of compounds to the banned substances list, which potentially include hundreds of different hazardous chemicals. They were unanimously approved today by the Public Health and Health Planning Council, which maintains a broad array of advisory and decision-making responsibilities with respect to New York State's public health and health care delivery system.

New York State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker said, "Far too many people continue to fall victim to synthetic marijuana and we must do all we can to get these drugs off of New York's streets. These new regulations strengthen our ability to fight back against the individuals who are producing and selling these dangerous substances by expanding the list of banned chemical compounds."

The new regulations are the latest in a series of efforts by the Governor to combat the widespread and deadly use of synthetic marijuana. The sale and possession of dozens of synthetic cannabinoids and bath salts were banned by the Department of Health at the urging of Governor Cuomo in August of 2012 and since then, the producers of synthetic cannabinoids have been attempting to skirt New York's strict regulations by developing new chemicals not specifically identified in existing regulations.

New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Commissioner Arlene Gonzalez-Sanchez said, “Synthetic marijuana use poses a grave threat to New Yorkers’ health and has caused many to harm themselves and engage in dangerous, erratic behavior. It is vital that we continue working to get these drugs off the street. These expanded regulations do that by strengthening New York’s ability to go after those who create and market these dangerous substances.”

Users of the synthetic mixtures can never be certain in which ways the drugs will harm them, but users have experienced symptoms that include renal failure, arrested heart rate, high blood pressure, loss of consciousness, violent behavior, nausea, vomiting, tremors, seizures, hallucinations, paranoia, agitation, anxiety, and even death. These effects can be similar to those of phencyclidine, or PCP.

Synthetic cannabinoids are marketed as legal and typically consist of plant material coated by chemicals, which are supposed to mimic THC, the active chemical compound in marijuana. The drugs are marketed as incense, herbal mixtures, or potpourri in order to mask their true purpose. Street names for substances include Spice, K2, Green Giant, Smacked, Wicked X, AK-47, Geeked Up, Ninja, Caution, Red Giant, and Keisha Kole.

An owner of an establishment as well as any other person possessing, distributing, selling or offering for sale prohibited synthetic drugs in violation of the regulations is subject to criminal penalties including a fine up to \$500 and/or up to 15 days in jail. Civil penalties include a fine up to \$2,000 per violation. DOH continues to partner with the New York State Police and other law enforcement agencies to crack down on the use of these synthetic drugs as they evolve.

The regulations will take effect upon receipt and filing with the Department of State. **The regulations are available in their entirety [here](#).**

If you are aware of locations where these products are being manufactured, sold, or distributed, please call the Synthetic Drug Hotline at 1-888-99-SALTS (1-888-997-2587). Additional information on synthetic cannabinoids is available [here](#).

New Yorkers struggling with an addiction, or whose loved ones are struggling, can call or text the State’s toll-free, 24-hour, 7-day-a-week HOPEline, 1-877-8-HOPENY (1-877-846-7369). The HOPEline is staffed by trained clinicians who are ready to answer questions and offer treatment referrals. Additional resources are available through the NYS OASAS website [here](#). A list of addiction treatment providers is available [here](#).

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