Synthetic Cathinone Sold as Crack Cocaine in Baltimore

DEA BULLETIN

(U) This DEA Bulletin is based on preliminary reporting and may be subject to updating as additional information becomes available.

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Event

In June and July 2017, law enforcement authorities made multiple undercover purchases of crack cocaine from one dealer in Baltimore, MD. In September 2017, official laboratory results indicated that two of these purchases tested as N-ethylpentylone Hydrochloride, a synthetic cathinone ("bath salts") derivative classified as a Schedule I Controlled Substance Analogue.[i]

Significance

N-ethylpentylone is often misrepresented as MDMA at music festivals all over the world, including England, New Zealand, and the United States, and has caused users to be hospitalized. As recently as September 19, 2017, a well-known harm reduction website (dancesafe.org) issued an alert to warn potential MDMA users that N-ethylpentylone had been found in purported Ecstasy tablets in Little Rock, AR. Although there have been no previous reports indicating that N-ethylpentylone has been sold as crack cocaine, these recent laboratory and open source reports underscore the lack of quality control in synthetic street drugs and one of the many dangers of using illicit drugs, whose contents are easily misrepresented.

Details

The chemical structure of N-ethylpentylone is substantially similar to pentylone, a Schedule I controlled synthetic cathinone. During the summer of 2017, N-ethylpentylone was present at every festival and event in New Zealand where testing was conducted and was most often passed off as ecstasy. Although festival-goers in England were warned about fake ecstasy pills containing pentylone and N-ethylpentylone in August 2017, many users needed urgent medical attention. Most recently, in September 2017, seven people required hospital treatment in New Jersey after consuming tablets that looked like MDMA but likely contained N-ethylpentylone.

In early July 2017, approximately one ounce of alleged crack cocaine was purchased from a dealer in Baltimore, MD. In late July 2017, another 4.5 ounces of crack cocaine were purchased from the same Baltimore dealer. In both instances, the purchased drugs appeared to be crack cocaine, but were not, instead testing as N-Ethylpentylone. It is unknown whether the dealer was aware that the product contained N-Ethylpentylone. Previous purchases from the dealer tested positive for crack cocaine.

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[i] A Schedule I controlled substance is a drug, chemical, or substance that has no currently accepted medical use in the United States; a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision; and a high potential for abuse. The Federal Analogue Act allows for any chemical or substance that is structurally or pharmacologically substantially similar to a controlled substance to be treated as if it were also scheduled if it is intended for human consumption.

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(U) This product was prepared by the DEA Washington Division. Comments and questions may be addressed to the Chief, Analysis and Production Section at dea.onsi@usdoj.gov. For media/press inquiries call (202) 307-7977.

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