

Sen. Chuck Schumer Introduces Bill to Make K2 Chemicals Illegal



BROOKLYN — After a mass overdose of K2 that left 33 hospitalized in Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York Senator Chuck Schumer is pushing for a ban of chemicals used to make the drug.

The Democrat announced a new bill Sunday that would make 22 chemicals illegal, including derivatives of substances like fentanyl — a synthetic opioid [used in epidurals](#) that experts say can be up to 100 times more potent than morphine.

[Synthetic marijuana](#), also known as K2, is made up of dried herbs or leaves typically sprayed with an assortment of varying chemicals. Substances range

widely from packet to packet depending on the distributor, which officials say makes it even more dangerous.

As authorities ban specific chemical compounds, manufacturers come up with new ones, making regulation difficult, according to officials.

“New York’s most recent K2 binge that left our ERs bulging and streets strewn with stupefied users with zombie-like symptoms are a sign of what’s to come if Congress doesn’t act quickly,” Schumer said in a statement.

“We need a federal hammer to nail these toxic concoctions of synthetic drugs before things get worse... Banning these drugs quickly will help the feds step up their game of whack-a-mole so that we can help stem the tide of synthetic drug use here in New York City and across the country.”

The legislation, “Dangerous Synthetic Drug Control Act of 2016,” would add nearly two dozen synthetic substances to the list of Schedule I drugs.

The designation would classify them as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

In 2015, [city lawmakers passed bills](#) making the sale of any product labeled as synthetic marijuana a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail or a \$5,000 fine, along with civil penalties.

Stores also risk revocation of their license to sell tobacco if caught peddling K2 and can be closed under the city’s nuisance abatement law.

Immediately following last week’s [mass overdoses on the Bedford-Stuyvesant and Bushwick border](#) and [raids on surrounding delis](#), Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced new statewide enforcement actions to tackle illegal sales of the drug.

If store owners are found selling, state authorities could revoke their liquor and lottery licenses, Cuomo said.

Experts say K2 users — many who also suffer from substance abuse issues with alcohol or other drugs — are drawn to synthetic marijuana for its cheap price and its strength.

While patients' symptoms can vary depending on the batch, the high of a "poor man's marijuana" can last as long as four days, said Dr. Indra Cidambi, addiction psychiatrist and medical director for the Center for Network Therapy.

Legislation has been proposed and passed in recent years to outlaw certain chemicals, but distributors will always come up with something else, Cidami said.

"The chemical formula will keep changing, it's like chasing a dog's tail trying to catch this. In my experience, decriminalization would be a good next step," she said.

"Don't even talk about whether it's legal or illegal, let's really talk about these problems as diseases."