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MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES MULTI-AGENCY STRATEGY TO END SALE AND USE OF K2, LINKED TO RECENT SPIKE IN EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS

Dismantled a citywide drug distribution ring in partnership with DEA, seizing over two tractor trailers worth of “K2” from processing facilities, arresting six suppliers, and conducting enforcement actions at over 80 bodegas

Administration partnering with City Council to criminalize the sale of K2

City to create public awareness campaign, uniform treatment protocols and targeted public health interventions to educate the public and ensure rapid and high-quality treatment

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio today announced a multi-agency strategy to reduce demand and supply for synthetic cannabinoids, often known by the brand name “K2.” To end the sale of a harmful drug that has led to a recent spike in emergency room visits, this multi-agency effort has already seized over 200 kilograms of the drug from sellers, is educating users and potential users about the dangers of using K2, and is working with the City Council to develop legislation to criminalize the sale of K2.

“K2 is poison and selling it will not be tolerated in New York City,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “This multi-agency effort is aggressively focusing on neighborhoods hardest hit by this toxic drug, ensuring that sellers are shut down and vulnerable user populations are connected to care. We will not stop until K2 is no longer harming New Yorkers.”

Targeted, multi-agency enforcement efforts began in July 2015 and have led to the takedown of a massive K2 distribution operation in New York City and a reduction in K2-related emergency room visits. The multi-agency strategy includes:

Reducing the supply of K2:

- The City, in partnership with the Drug Enforcement Administration, conducted searches of five processing facilities that resulted in the seizure of about \$17.5 million worth of K2 product, ingredients and paraphernalia – including at least 200 kilograms of synthetic compounds used to make K2, and 150,000 packets of finished K2. Ten individuals were indicted in connection with the drug ring and federal charges are being pursued by the Manhattan U.S. Attorney’s Office. More than 80 stores and bodegas throughout New York City were inspected as part of the enforcement action.
- Multi-agency enforcement actions will continue, and the results of these actions will be shared widely with bodega owners and cigarette distributors to increase awareness of the consequences of selling K2.
- The Department of Consumer Affairs has issued, and will continue to pursue, violations for inadequate and misleading labeling. Consequences for retailers selling K2 include the assessment

of fines and the potential suspension or revocation of licenses issued by the agency, such as cigarette retail dealer licenses.

Reducing the demand for K2:

- DCA and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene will spearhead a comprehensive public awareness campaign that will educate users and potential users about the harms of using K2 and dispel the many myths surrounding the marketing of K2 as legal and safe.
- Building off a successful model recently used in Houston, New York City will hold a summit on K2 that will address the harmful effects of its use and best practices for treating users both from a public safety and public health perspective.
- The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has released a third health advisory on synthetic cannabinoids

Ending the distribution of K2:

- The administration is working closely with the City Council on legislation that will increase penalties for the sale of K2 in New York City.
- Additionally, the City is working with state representatives on state legislation to complement City policy.

Ensuring effectiveness:

- City health agencies are monitoring cannabinoid-related emergency department visits daily and are developing a standardized treatment protocol and management plan for people who present with K2 use in emergency rooms.
- The City will track enforcement strategies to ensure that sales of the drug cease and ensure that public health resources are rapidly deployed to meet emergent user health needs.

The administration's combined public health and law enforcement approach will target a drug that appears in various toxic forms and has disproportionately affected residents of shelters and individuals with psychiatric illnesses.

Sold in bodegas, synthetic cannabinoids are leaves sprayed with unpredictable and diverse chemical combinations that are either smoked or ingested. The drugs go by a variety of names, such as K2, Spice, Green Giant, and Caution and produce adverse consequences ranging from agitation to vomiting to tremor seizures to hallucinations to violent behavior.

Since January, 2015, there have been more than 3,000 synthetic cannabinoid-related emergency department visits in New York City, with more than 1,200 emergency department visits occurring in July. Males account for approximately 90% of these emergency room visits. Patients have a median age of 37 and are disproportionately residents of shelters and individuals with a psychiatric illness. Nearly all (99 percent) of patients are aged 18 and older.

Led by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the multi-agency effort includes representatives from the New York Police Department, the Department of Consumer Affairs, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Health and Hospitals Corporation, the Law Department, the Department of Homeless Services, the Sheriff, and the Attorney General's office.

"K2 has no place in New York City and we are using all available tools to deter production, sale and use," said **Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice**. "Focused enforcement efforts, smart

regulatory actions, detailed public health monitoring and targeted information campaigns will help to ensure that this drug no longer harms New Yorkers.”

“K2 is a terrifying and unpredictable drug – a user never knows what combination of chemicals they may be getting and how it will affect their mind or body,” said **Department of Consumer Affairs Commissioner Julie Menin**. “The false marketing of K2 as herbal incense or potpourri, coupled with packages featuring colorful cartoon characters, misleadingly portrays these products as safe and legal, which violates the City’s Consumer Protection Law. As part of our collaborative efforts, the City is committed to dispelling these myths, educating New Yorkers about the dangers of K2, and punishing those who put New Yorkers at risk by selling it.”

“The spread of K2 has been a growing crisis in East Harlem and across New York City, resulting in mental impairment and hospitalization for those who have consumed it,” said **Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**. “The Council has been on the forefront of addressing this public health and public safety hazard, and we have been clear that K2 will not be tolerated in our communities. I am happy to continue working with the administration and various city agencies to develop a comprehensive plan to take this dangerous substance off our streets.”

“K2 is a threat to the health and safety of New York City, and we must take decisive action,” said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams**. “This is not a plant. This is not marijuana. This is a dangerous chemical that is being used to distort behavior, and it’s something that we want to see off our streets immediately. We need the help from government and everyday New Yorkers to move this conversation forward.”

“We must extinguish the use of K2 throughout the state. City hospitals hit a high in July – with over 1,000 emergency room visits resulting from K2 use and throughout the state hospitals reported thousands of visits over the past months. We must take action to criminalize K2 sales from upstate to downstate. I’ve been working on a robust package of legislation on the state level to crackdown on K2 use across all of New York State and I will continue to work with the city on these very important initiatives. I applaud Mayor de Blasio’s multi-agency strategy as we work to get this poison off the streets of our city and our state,” said **State Senator Jeffrey D. Klein, Senate Coalition Leader**.

“K2 is causing severe problems in communities across New York City,” said **Council Member Corey Johnson, Chair of the Committee on Health**. “An aggressive, multi-agency approach is needed to address this threat. We must use every tool available to us, including enforcement, legislation, education, and treatment for those who are in need of help. This is a major health concern for our City, and we in government have a responsibility to act. I thank the de Blasio administration for its comprehensive, proactive efforts to address this important issue.”

“K2 is a falsely marketed, poisonous substance that is creating a public health hazard. As Chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Disability Services I would like to thank Mayor de Blasio for his leadership in taking K2 off the streets of New York City and for his partnership with the City Council to pass legislation that will make the sale of K2 a criminal act,” said **Council Member Andrew Cohen, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health**.

“We cannot ignore the abundance of synthetic cannabinoids within our communities. K2 is an unregulated and potentially deadly substance and I commend this City for devising a coordinated multiagency plan to address this growing epidemic. As chair of the Committee on Public Safety, I applaud the Administration and the Council for their joint work on legislation that will criminalize actions of the manufacturers and distributors of K2, rather than the actions of substance abusers. I anticipate this coordinated plan will enhance the NYPD’s work in keeping K2 and similar substances off of our streets and out of our corner stores,” said **Council Member Vanessa Gibson, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety**.

“K2 is a uniquely dangerous substance that poses a serious threat to our community. We have already seen the detrimental effects of the sale and abuse of the drug in its many forms, and we cannot wait one moment longer

to take action. I am proud to be a part of efforts to stem the spread of a K2 epidemic,” said **Council Member Fernando Cabrera**.

“K2 is a killer drug and is posing unique challenges to traditional enforcement,” said **Council Member Dan Garodnick**. “The City Council bills and this multi-agency approach will give us the tools we need to get K2 off the streets.”

“The K2 epidemic has had a major impact on quality-of-life for residents in my district, and I’m very glad to see this issue being addressed on multiple fronts,” said **Council Member Antonio Reynoso**. “The new laws that the Council is proposing will help us tackle the issue in Bushwick and citywide. Along with the Mayor’s efforts to curb sale and distribution, we are sending a clear message that K2 will not be tolerated in our communities.”

“I applaud the Mayor and Speaker for spearheading a coordinated strategy to take K2 out of our stores and off of our streets,” said **Council Member Ritchie Torres**. “This dangerous drug is poisoning our communities and we must work at every level of government to curb both the supply and demand for K2.”

“K2 is a menace. The threat that it and other synthetic drugs have posed to our citizens demands a multifaceted approach to tackling this public health crisis. I applaud Mayor de Blasio for his comprehensive plan of action that will reinforce our City’s ongoing efforts to combat the spread of K2. This plan includes working with the Council to enact legislation that will impose severe penalties on the major traffickers of synthetic marijuana, and I am proud to be one of the lead sponsors of this endeavor,” said **Council Member Ruben Wills**. “Together, we will choke off the K2 pipeline that has jeopardized the safety of our communities.”

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