

New Russian Synthetic Marijuana Blend Kills 4, Sends 42 to Hospital

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A new marijuana blend containing an unidentified psychotropic substance claimed four lives and sent dozens scrambling to Kirov region hospitals over the weekend, Interfax reported Tuesday, citing the regional health department.

The deceased were all males aged 15 to 24. While one victim drowned under the influence of the drug, the other three appear to have been poisoned, leading local authorities to sound the alarm over mass-poisoning fears.

Since Friday, 122 people have been diagnosed with poisoning, regional health department spokeswoman Olga Vaghina said in comments carried by Interfax. Of those, 42 have been hospitalized, two of whom were listed as in critical condition Monday.

Everyone who sought medical help in connection with the new marijuana blend were found to have experienced "seizures, respiratory failure and displayed inappropriate behavior" after smoking the drug, Interfax reported.

Smoking mixtures, commonly sold as synthetic marijuana or "spice," have been banned in Russia and included on a list of prohibited substances. Prior to their inclusion on the list, the substances were sold under the guise of common household substances, like fish food or bath salts.

Still, there are endless possibilities for synthesizing new compounds, allowing drug dealers to find loopholes in the law by simply creating new substances that have not yet been included on the list of banned substances.

A spokesperson for the Federal Drug Control Service told Interfax that the poisoning in Kirov may have stemmed from such an attempt to circumvent the law, as drug dealers in the region had begun distributing a new psychotropic substance that has not yet been included in the government's register of banned substances.

The agency said the poisoning came to light over the weekend, when medics were called to various locations in the region from Friday to Sunday, treating a total of 99 people during that three-day period.

"The victims were mainly aged between 18 and 35. There were also 24 teenagers poisoned, predominantly between the ages of 15 and 16," Interfax cited a spokesperson as saying.

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