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# Drugs Kill Most Russians That Die Young

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Synthetic marijuana and other smoking blends known generally as “spice” have hit the market, propelled by online sales and Internet marketing.

Drugs claim the lives of the overwhelming majority of Russians who die young, a leading official told a television interviewer Saturday.

In the past five years, 550,000 people between the ages of 18 and 34 have lost their lives in Russia, Viktor Ivanov, head of the Federal Drug Control Service, said in an interview with TV Center.

"This is a complete anomaly. For instance in Japan, which has a comparable population size to Russia, the figure stands at 5,000," he said. Despite a profound disparity in geographic size, Japan's population is about 127 million, while Russia's stands at about 145 million.

Moreover, drugs are to blame for 80 percent of young lives lost in Russia over the past five years, Ivanov said.

That rate has improved somewhat over the years. In 2006, 140,000 people between 15-34 died of drug use. In 2013, that figure dropped to 95,000, Ivanov said, noting that despite the improvement, the number is still too high.

Russia has long-suffered the impact of the trafficking of heroin from Afghanistan. More recently, synthetic marijuana and other smoking blends known generally as "spice" have hit the market, propelled by online sales and Internet marketing.

While the most common components of the drug have been included in a list of prohibited substances, old ingredients can easily be replaced with new ones to allow drug dealers to sidestep the list of banned substances.

At least 700 people across Russia have been poisoned in recent months after smoking spice. Of those, 21 people have died, RIA Novosti reported on Friday.

The State Duma is currently considering a bill that would criminalize drug consumption in Russia. At present, drug consumption constitutes an administrative offense. If the bill passes, drug-addicts could face four to six months in jail.

Lawmakers also are drafting a bill aimed at prohibiting all smoking blends in Russia. The draft is set to be submitted to the State Duma in the coming days, legislator Sergei Kalashnikov told Ekho Moskvy radio on Sunday.

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