European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

COUNCIL CALLS ON EU SCIENTISTS TO ASSESS RISKS OF FOUR NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

Four new drugs go under the microscope in the wake of rising health concerns

(29.1.2014, LISBON) Europe has responded to rising concern over the use of four new drugs by formally requesting a scientific investigation into the health and social risks of the substances. The decision was communicated to the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)** by the **Council of the EU** today, in line with a legal procedure designed to respond to potentially harmful new psychoactive drugs in the EU ([1]).

The Council requests the **EMCDDA Scientific Committee** to conduct formal risk assessments of the four new substances — **25I-NBOMe**, **AH-7921**, **MDPV** and **methoxetamine** — after harmful effects related to the drugs were reported by the Member States and picked up by the **EU Early-warning system** ([2]). The substances will be scrutinised by the Committee in Lisbon in April, with the participation of additional experts from the **EU Member States**, **European Commission**, **Europol** and the **European Medicines Agency (EMA)**.

The upcoming risk assessments will include an appraisal of the chemical and pharmacological properties of each drug and their abuse and dependence-causing potential. The health and social risks associated with the drugs, prevalence of use and the involvement of organised crime in their production and distribution will also be probed.

Today's decision is based on the findings of four **EMCDDA–Europol joint reports** submitted in December to the **Council of the EU**, the **European Commission** and the **EMA**. These reports are released today on the EMCDDA website and present the information collected on each substance from the EU Member States, Turkey and Norway ([3]).

25I-NBOMe, a substituted phenethylamine drug with apparent hallucinogenic effects, has been available on the EU drug market since at least May 2012 and has been detected in 23 EU Member States and Norway. Severe toxicity associated with its use has been reported in four Member States and three deaths associated with the drug have been reported.

AH-7921, a synthetic opioid drug, has been available in the EU since at least July 2012 and has been detected in seven EU Member States and Norway. In most cases, it has been seized in small quantities as a powder. Over a short period of time it has been associated with six non-fatal intoxications and 15 deaths in three countries. The similarity of AH-7921 to morphine in terms of its pharmacology is a key concern. This could play an important role in the further spread of AH-7921 by opioid users, including the injecting population.

MDPV, a stimulant drug belonging to the group of synthetic cathinone derivatives, is closely related to pyrovalerone. MDPV has been present in the EU drug market since at least November 2008 and has been detected in up to 107 non-fatal intoxications and 99 deaths (particularly in Finland and the United Kingdom). There are some indications that it has been sold as a 'legal' or synthetic version of cocaine. It has also been found in tablets resembling 'ecstasy'. Large seizures (including multi-kilogram quantities) have been made at borders and police operations have targeted its supply. Most, but not all the Member States, have control measures in place at national level covering MDPV; however, its continued availability is a cause for concern.

Contact: Kathy Robertson, Media relations • Kathryn.Robertson@emcdda.europa.eu
Praça Europa 1, Cais do Sodré, 1249-289 Lisbon, Portugal • Tel. (351) 211 21 02 00
press@emcdda.europa.eu • www.emcdda.europa.eu
EN — No 1/2014

Methoxetamine, an arylcyclohexamine drug, related in many respects to ketamine, has been available on the EU drug market since at least September 2010. It has been detected in 22 Member States, Turkey and Norway. Powder seizures have been reported including multi-kilogram quantities. One hundred and ten (110) non-fatal intoxications associated with the substance have been reported, as well as 20 deaths.

There have been some instances of these new substances being offered as replacements to controlled drugs. **Methoxetamine**, for example, is being marketed as a 'legal and bladder-friendly' alternative to ketamine and, at the same time, is being sold directly on the illicit drug market as ketamine. Meanwhile, **25I-NBOMe** has been sold as a 'legal' alternative to LSD or illicitly as LSD.

Following the meeting of the **Scientific Committee** in April, four risk assessment reports will be submitted to the **European Commission** and the **Council of the EU**. On the basis of these reports, the **Commission** may recommend to the **Council** that the drugs be submitted to control measures across the EU.

Notes

([1]) For more on the Council Decision three-step legal system (information exchange, risk assessment, control), see www.emcdda.europa.eu/activities/action-on-new-drugs and http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005D0387:EN:HTML
([2]) For more on the EMCDDA Scientific Committee, see www.emcdda.europa.eu/about/sc
For more on the EU Early-warning system, see www.emcdda.europa.eu/themes/new-drugs/early-warning
([3]) Download the Joint reports at www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint-reports