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Bill restricting medicine used in 'speed' advances

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PHOENIX - Brushing aside claims of consumer inconvenience, a House panel voted Monday to restrict the sale of more than 200 medications that contain pseudoephedrine.

House Bill 2175, which now goes to the full House, would require anyone who purchases any drug with pseudoephedrine, a popular decongestant, to present identification and sign a log book.

That book, which would be available to police, would help enforce one provision of the legislation to ensure that no one purchases more than nine grams of the drug in any month.

That's less than half the current legal limit.

The requirement for the log book creates a new mandate for any medication with pseudoephedrine to be stored behind the pharmacy counter and dispensed only from there.

The unanimous vote by the Committee on Natural Resources and Agriculture came after pleas from not just Democrat Attorney General Terry Goddard but also people representing police departments and firefighters.

They said the ease of purchasing the drug, used to make methamphetamines, not only leads to widespread availability of "speed" but also creates the danger of explosions and toxic fumes from homes where the chemicals are "cooked."

But the proposal still faces an uncertain future because of an alliance of retailers, pharmacists and drug manufacturers, which does not want the kinds of limits being proposed.

Mike Gardner, who represents drug companies that make Sudafed and various equivalents now available over the counter, said the legislation will hurt consumers.

"If the pharmacy is closed or if there's not a pharmacy in my town, I won't have access to those products," he told lawmakers. In fact, Gardner said, someone at an airport waiting for an airplane would be out of luck entirely.

But Rep. Tom O'Halleran, R-Sedona, who chairs the panel, said that isn't telling the whole story.

"Many of the medications that are restricted and would be placed behind the counter also have counterparts that are just as effective, or almost as effective, that would not have to go behind the counter," he said.

O'Halleran, a former Chicago police detective, said the legislation would not affect medications with pseudo-ephedrine that are sold in liquor- or gel-filled

By the numbers

- Current law allows an individual to purchase up to 24 grams of pseudoephedrine in one month.

That equals:

- 800 30 mg tables or
- 400 60 mg tablets or
- 267 90 mg capsules

Meth production

- It takes 20,160 tablets of 90 mg to produce about one pound of meth.

- Proposed law would limit monthly sales to nine grams.

- Five mg of meth is a dose for a beginning user.

- One pound produces close to 91,000 doses for a beginning meth user.

- One-quarter gram, which is about 50 doses, costs about \$25 on the street.

- From 1/03 through 2/04, Tucson had 109 meth seizures totaling 74.32 pounds.

Crimes

In Pima County, crimes directly related to methamphetamine include:

- 66 percent of all burglaries
- 56 percent of all fraud
- 27 percent of all auto thefts
- 95 percent of all mail theft and fraud

Source: David Neri, captain,

capsules. He also noted that even Pfizer, which makes Sudafed, has come out with a new version, Sudafed PE, which has an active ingredient that can't be used to make meth.

Michelle Ahlmer, executive director of the Arizona Retailers Association, said there are other ways to cut down on meth production. She favors the approach in Senate Bill 1473, being promoted by Sen. Barbara Leff, R-Paradise Valley, which imposes new penalties on those who manufacture methamphetamines, especially if there are children present, but continues to allow drugs like Sudafed to be stocked on the shelf.

Leff's bill also has no monthly restriction on what people can buy. Instead, a purchaser would be limited to no more than nine grams at one time - the equivalent of 150 60 mg doses.

Foes may get their way: Sen. John Huppenthal, R-Chandler, who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, said Monday he remains unconvinced that the kind of sales restrictions being proposed by O'Halleran will do any good.

Huppenthal acknowledged that Oklahoma, which has a similar law, saw a sharp drop in the number of meth houses raided after the drugs were put behind the counter. But Huppenthal said other states, including Arizona, also have seen a decline as police enforce existing laws.

Capt. David Neri of the Tucson Police Department told lawmakers that more needs to be done to combat methamphetamines.

Neri said Tucson police found that 38 "high-profile meth offenders" committed 868 crimes over five years; 108 classified as "most active meth offenders" were responsible for 3,967 crimes over that same period.

commander, Pima County Tucson Metropolitan Counter Narcotics Alliance

Which drugs will be affected

- This is a partial list of medications which, in some varieties, contain pseudoephedrine. Always check the label. (Note: legislation would restrict sale of only tablets and capsules and not versions that are either liquid or gels.)

Actifed

Advil Cold and Sinus

Afrin

Aleve Cold and Sinus

Benadryl Allergy & Cold Caplets

Chlortrimeton
Allergy/Decongestant

Claritin D

Codral Day & Night

Comtrex Cough and Cold

Comtrex Deep Chest Cold

Contact Severe Cold and Flu Non-Drowsy

Coricidin D

Dimetapp

Drixoral Cold and Flu

Meridia

Novahistine DMX

Orthoxicol Cold and Flu

Panadol Sinus

Pediacare Decongestant

Robitussin CF

Robitussin Sinus & Congestion

Robitussin PE

Semprex D

Sigma Relief

Sinarest

Sinutab

Sudafed

Triaminic Allergy

Trinalin

Tussinol for Dry Coughs

Tylenol Allergy Sinus Nighttime

Tylenol Cold

Zyrtec D

Various generic equivalents sold under various store and manufacturer names

- Source: PDRHealth/Thomson Healthcare; other Web sites

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