

Kansas' new electronic weapon in the war on meth.

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TOPEKA – For Kansas meth cooks, getting a key ingredient for making the illegal drug is about to get more difficult. Kansas leaders Monday announced the launch of a new electronic tracking system that will keep pharmacies and police informed on who is going store to store, buying the products containing pseudoephedrine, and block the sale for those over the legal limit. The announcement was made during a news conference at the Kansas Statehouse.

Cold and allergy products, such as Sudafed-D, Claritin D, Zyrtec-D, Tylenol Cold and Sinus, are key ingredients in the manufacture of methamphetamine. Kansas is the sixth state to adopt the electronic tracking system known as the National Precursor Log Exchange, or NPLEx.

The Kansas Board of Pharmacy has entered into an agreement with Appriss, Inc., of Louisville, Ky., to deploy NPLEx in Kansas, at no cost to the state. The move to electronic tracking is the result of the recommendation of the Kansas Methamphetamine Precursor Scheduling Task Force, which was formed in 2008 in response to the growth in illegal over-the-counter purchases of cold medicines for use in the manufacture of methamphetamine. The group recommended the state establish a real-time electronic logbook system and require any pharmacy selling pseudoephedrine or ephedrine products to utilize the system.

"NPLEx is designed to help in the battle against illegal meth labs without creating an unnecessary burden on pharmacists and consumers," said David Schoech, a Columbus pharmacist, and Kansas Board of Pharmacy member. "We believe this represents the most effective way of blocking the illegal sales of these important products while continuing to provide them to the law-abiding citizens who need them."

Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt welcomed the announcement as a step forward in the fight against methamphetamine production.

"Keeping pseudoephedrine out of the hands of meth producers is one of the most effective ways to stop meth production," said Attorney General Schmidt. "This new electronic system strengthens our ability to do that on an instant basis, and will serve as a valuable tool in finding and shutting down meth labs."

State Senator Vicki Schmidt (R-Topeka), who has been a leader on implementing this system, also commented on today's announcement.

"As a state senator and practicing pharmacist, I believe this new system is a positive step in the right direction," Senator Schmidt said. "It is the culmination of four years of work that will help track the sales of these methamphetamine precursor drugs."

Jim Acquisto, director of Appriss explained how the system will work. A customer's photo identification is scanned by the pharmacy and the data is entered into a secure, Web-based portal. When a transaction that would exceed the legal limit is entered, a message is instantly sent to the retailer recommending denial of sale. The information is transferred instantly to the database where it is available for review by law enforcement.

The NPLEx system is connected to approximately one-third of the nation's pharmacies. Launched in Kentucky two years ago, NPLEx tracks the sale of more than 344,000 boxes of over-the-counter cold and allergy medicines a month in pharmacies across the country. Since the NPLEx database is multi-state, illegal purchases are blocked across state lines, preventing meth cooks from obtaining the precursor of any other NPLEx-connected retailer.

NPLEx is a collaboration led by the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI) as well as law enforcement, healthcare professionals, state regulatory agencies, and pharmaceutical manufacturers. NPLEx is funded by manufacturers of those medicines and therefore is free of charge to any state that chooses to join the system.

Other NPLEx states include Louisiana, Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa. Washington, Alabama, South Carolina, and Florida have passed legislation to move forward with electronic tracking and join the NPLEx network.