

# Florida bans 'bath salt' drugs after violent outbursts

By

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Florida became the second state in the nation to ban drugs sold as "bath salts" on Wednesday.

State Attorney General Pam Bondi cited disturbing reports of violent drug users "with superhuman strength" in banning the so-called fake cocaine.

The white powder, sold at gas stations and specialty shops around the state, has sent dozens of users to emergency rooms and mental hospitals in recent months, according to authorities.

Along with Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Gerald Bailey and Bay County Sheriff Frank McKeithen, Bondi said her emergency order would add substances containing MDPV, a chemical found in the "bath salts," to the schedule of controlled substances – making it a third-degree felony to sell the products. Louisiana is the only other state that bans substances containing MDPV.



"To put it in perspective, that's right up there with cocaine and heroin," Bondi said in a news conference held at the Capitol in Tallahassee.

Authorities think the drugs are thought to be coming into the United States from China.



Poison control centers in Florida have reported 61 calls about abuse of the "bath salts" – the state with the second-highest volume of related calls after Louisiana. Most of the state's cases came from Central and Northern Florida, but disoriented users have arrived at [Broward County](#) hospitals with high blood pressure and hallucinations, said Nabil El Sanadi, chief of emergency medicine at Broward Health.

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The “bath salts” have led to violent, suicidal episodes in North Florida this month, prompting McKeithen, the Bay County sheriff, to urge business owners to take the products off their shelves.

Two cases on Martin Luther King Jr. Day shocked authorities in the Panama City area. A woman, apparently high on bath salts, burst into her 71-year-old mother’s room swinging a machete, according to Panama City Beach police.

Pamela Higgins, 48, reportedly asked her mom, “You ain’t dead yet?”

No one was hurt, but Higgins was arrested by Panama City Beach police on charges of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

That same day, it took seven Bay County deputies to restrain a man who reportedly snorted Blue Silk, a common brand name of the fake cocaine, according to Ruth Corley, spokeswoman for the Bay County Sheriff’s Office. His girlfriend called police from the airport, worried that he was acting crazily.

Paramedics were unable to calm him down, Corley said, and deputies were forced to wrestle him into a patrol car. He tore apart the back seat of the car with his teeth, screaming “Please help me, please help me, I’m dying,” Corley said.

Bondi said her office became aware of the drug this week, when McKeithen expressed concern its use would dramatically increase during Spring Break.

“It’s creating superhuman strength that takes seven to eight officers to deal with these individuals,” he said. “Our problem is it could be a perfect storm ... that’s our biggest concern with over 2,000 kids coming to Panama City for Spring Break.”

Bondi said she acted so quickly because the drug poses a “real and imminent hazard to the health, safety and welfare of Floridians.” The ban criminalizes the product for 90 days, and legislative leaders at the press conference indicated they would act to permanently ban it in the lawmaking session that starts in March.

Skyrocketing overdoses of some products labeled bath salts in Louisiana spurred Gov. Bobby Jindal to enact an emergency ban of MDPV and other chemicals found in some products on Jan. 6. More than half of the country’s cases have been reported there, and law enforcement has connected at least two suicides to the bath salts.

In December, the DEA listed MDPV as a drug of concern but has no current plans to ban it nationwide.

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