

“Krokodil”

“Krokodil” is a homemade synthetic form of a heroin-like drug called desomorphine that is made by combining codeine tablets with various toxic chemicals including lighter fluid and industrial cleaners. This extremely dangerous mixture gets its name from the scaly, gray-green dead skin that forms at the site of an injection. The flesh destroyed by krokodil becomes gangrenous, and, in some cases, limb amputation has been necessary to save a user’s life.

Desomorphine has a similar effect to heroin in the brain, although it is more powerful and has a shorter duration. For the past decade, homemade desomorphine has been used as a cheap heroin substitute in poor rural areas of Russia, and its use has also been reported in Germany. More recently, it has been reported in a few U.S. states.

“N-bomb”

“N-bomb” refers to any of three closely related synthetic hallucinogens (25I-NBOMe, 25C-NBOMe, and 25B-NBOMe) that are being sold as legal substitutes for LSD or mescaline. Also called “legal acid,” “smiles,” or “25I,” they are generally found as powders, liquids, soaked into blotter paper (like LSD) or laced on something edible.

These chemicals act on serotonin receptors in the brain, like other hallucinogens, but they are considerably more powerful even than LSD. Extremely small amounts can cause seizures, heart attack or arrested breathing, and death. At least 14 young people are reported to have died after taking 25I- 25C- or 25B-NBOMe between March 2012 and April 2013. For more information, see http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_chem_info/nbome.pdf (PDF, 217KB)

“Syrup,” “Purple Drank,” “Sizzurp,” “Lean”

Drinking prescription-strength cough syrup containing codeine and promethazine mixed with soda was referenced frequently in rap music beginning in the late 90s and has now become increasingly popular among youth in several areas of the country, according to recent CEWG data. Codeine is an opioid that can produce relaxation and euphoria when consumed in sufficient quantities. Promethazine is an antihistamine that also acts as a sedative. Users may also flavor the mixture with the addition of hard candies.

Codeine and other opioids present a high risk of fatal overdose due to their effect of depressing the central nervous system, which can slow or stop the heart and lungs. Mixing with alcohol greatly increases this risk. Deaths from prescription opioid medications now outnumber overdose deaths from all other drugs (including cocaine and heroin), and codeine-promethazine cough syrup has been linked to the overdose deaths of some prominent rap musicians.

