



# News release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

## EUROPE'S RESPONSE TO NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

### European Commission adopts measures to control two harmful new drugs amidst health concerns and surge in supply

(18.03.2022, LISBON) Today, the **European Commission** has adopted measures to control two harmful new psychoactive substances (NPS) across the EU <sup>(1)</sup>. The substances in question — 3-methylmethcathinone (3-MMC) and 3-chloromethcathinone (3-CMC) — are both synthetic cathinones, which have been raising concerns in Europe. The delegated act follows risk assessments conducted by the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)** in November 2021 <sup>(2)</sup> as part of a three-step legal procedure designed to respond to potentially threatening new drugs available on the market <sup>(3)</sup>.

**Synthetic cathinones** are a group of stimulant substances chemically related to cathinone, the main psychoactive substance in the **khat** plant (*Catha edulis*). Cathinone itself is chemically similar to amphetamine, and it is included in Schedule I of the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances. At the end of 2021, the **EMCDDA** was monitoring 162 synthetic cathinones, making it the second largest category of NPS (after synthetic cannabinoids) under observation. Cathinones are marketed as 'legal' replacements to controlled stimulants, such as amphetamine, MDMA, and cocaine.

The **risk assessments** on 3-MMC and 3-CMC, conducted by an extended **EMCDDA Scientific Committee** <sup>(4)</sup>, examined the health and social risks of the substances, their availability and use in Europe, international trafficking and the involvement of organised crime. At the time of these assessments, 27 and 10 deaths with confirmed exposure to 3-MMC and 3-CMC respectively had been reported by Member States through the **EU Early Warning System (EWS)**.

3-MMC and 3-CMC are reportedly being sold as legal replacements to the closely related substances mephedrone and 4-chloromethcathinone (4-CMC) that were controlled internationally in 2015 and 2020, respectively. Most cathinone use appears to be recreational and involves snorting or ingesting, but injecting is also reported in high-risk settings, such as 'chemsex' parties <sup>(5)</sup>.

The risk assessments revealed a recent marked increase in the supply of cathinone powders in Europe. A total of 3 300 kg of these powders was seized in 2020 (750 kg in 2019), with 3-CMC accounting for 880 kg and 3-MMC for 750 kg. Following controls on these substances in China, they now appear to be manufactured in India and imported into Europe 'on an industrial scale'. In 2021, a combined amount of 1 500 kg of 3-MMC and 3-CMC originating in India was reported to the EWS. A smaller part of the cathinone supply originates inside Europe, where a growing number of production sites have been seized since 2019.

Today's adoption of a delegated act is based on the latest legislation designed to bring a stronger and faster response to NPS in Europe <sup>(6)</sup>. The European Parliament and the Council will have two months to analyse the act before it enters into force, after which the Member States have six months to introduce the relevant national legislation.

**EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel** said: 'For the past 25 years, the EU Early Warning System has contributed to a healthier and more secure Europe by detecting and monitoring over 880 new drugs and assessing the risks of 37. Today's move by the European Commission to control two new stimulants, which are in increasing supply, demonstrates the EU's ability to act quickly on threats posed by new psychoactive substances. A strong EU Early Warning System is vital to responding to today's drug phenomenon, which now covers a much broader range of substances, behaviours and people'.

### Notes

(<sup>1</sup>) See European Commission [news](#). [Delegated acts](#) are non-legislative acts adopted by the European Commission to amend or supplement non-essential elements of legislation. Today's delegated act includes 3-MMC and 3-CMC in the definition of 'drug' under EU law by amending the Annex to the Council Framework Decision 2004/757/JHA (as amended).

(<sup>2</sup>) Risk assessment reports: [3-MMC](#) and [3-CMC](#).

(<sup>3</sup>) Early warning, risk assessment, control. See web pages on [NPS](#), [risk assessments](#) and [EWS](#). Three synthetic cathinones — [mephedrone](#), [MDPV](#) and [α-PVP](#) — have already been brought under control across Europe following this procedure.

(<sup>4</sup>) The extended EMCDDA Scientific Committee includes its regular [members](#) plus additional experts from the EU Member States, European Commission, Europol, the European Medicines Agency and the EMCDDA.

(<sup>5</sup>) See Spotlight 2021: [Addressing sexual health issues associated with drug use](#).

(<sup>6</sup>) [Regulation \(EC\) No 1920/2006](#) (as amended) and [Council Framework Decision 2004/757/JHA](#) (as amended). Further details [here](#).