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FDA to Generation Xers:

Don't buy dietary supplements with Ephedrine

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government moved Wednesday to curb sales of an herb offering Generation Xers a "natural high," telling consumers not to buy such dietary supplements as Herbal Ecstasy that contain the stimulant ephedrine.

The supplements are advertised to young people — sometimes as a "natural" alternative to illegal drugs — promising euphoria, heightened sexual awareness and enhanced athletic performance. They're found everywhere and in various forms — from tablets in health-food stores to special fruit drinks sold on the beaches of California and Florida.

The supplements are "aimed directly toward youth for the express purpose of catching a buzz," said FDA spokesman Arthur Whitmore.

The FDA has learned of 15 people who died after taking ephedrine-containing supplements and has received almost 400 other reports of side effects, from heart attacks and seizures to psychosis.

So the agency warned consumers not to buy or use the supplements, and is collecting corner reports and other evidence in an effort to take regulatory action against manufacturers.

The products are "recreational, street drug-like products that are masquerading as dietary supplements," said FDA Commissioner David Kessler, who investigated when the relatives of a 20-year-old who died questioned him about ephedrine. "I believe they're drugs and should be treated as such."

Herbal Ecstasy manufacturer Global World Media Corp. of Venice, Calif., did not return phone calls seeking comment.

But an industry trade group said not all ephedrine was a problem, noting that the

FDA warning does not target ephedrine-containing supplements used to help people lose weight.

"There are legitimate uses of ephedra which are different from the drug-type, drug-mocking uses that FDA is concerned about," said Annette Dickinson of the Council for Responsible Nutrition. "The responsible part of the industry is as anxious as the FDA to get this resolved."

Ephedrine, an amphetamine-like stimulant and a common ingredient in certain nonprescription asthma medicines, long has been controversial. The FDA recently proposed taking ephedrine out of asthma products because of its risks.

It's also a central ingredient in the illegal drug methamphetamine, known as speed, and "ecstasy" is the street name for another illegal drug, MDMA.

But in dietary supplements, manufacturers promote the botanical source of ephedrine as "natural" and safe, often listing the stimulant under the herbal names ephedra or ma huang and sometimes advertising that they're FDA-approved.

The FDA does not approve dietary supplements. In fact, legislation Congress passed in 1994 slows how quickly the FDA can ban a dangerous supplement.

Until 1994, the FDA simply declared a suspicious supplement to be an unapproved drug that must prove its safety before it could resume sales. Now, the FDA must prove each version of the supplement sold is dangerous before taking it off the market.

The new law encouraged some "irresponsible companies" to push unsafe use of dietary supplements, even as the FDA became

reluctant to spend the extra time and money now needed to seize dangerous ones, said Purdue University herbal medicine expert Varro Tyler.

"The industry knows that it can sell these products long enough to get money out before the FDA acts," he said. "For the consumer, this becomes a game of herbal roulette."

"Unfortunately, you have to wait until there's harm and prove harm," agreed FDA's Kessler. But, he added, "We will take regulatory action here."

"(The supplements are) aimed directly toward youth for the express purpose of catching a buzz."

— ARTHUR WHITMORE
FDA spokesman

But the industry's Dickinson countered that people misused ephedrine long before the 1994 law, calling the recent rise in popularity among young people a coincidental fact.

As the FDA moves to curb the drug-like use of ephedrine supplements, it also is working with supplement manufacturers to put safety warnings on ephedrine products used for weight loss. People with hypertension, heart disease or diabetes, for instance, shouldn't use such products, Tyler said.

More than a dozen states have their own restrictions on ephedrine supplements, banning certain ones, restricting their sale to adults or requiring safety warnings.

Consumers may report side effects from ephedrine supplements by calling 1-800-FDA-4010.

ATM WHAT'S UP

Thursday

Catholic Students Association: All those who have made an Aggie Awakening Retreat are welcome to attend Fourth Day at 6:15 p.m. at St. Mary's Student Center. For information call Bee Lee at 764-1824.

Catholic Students Association: ESCALA general meeting will be held at 8:00 p.m. at St. Mary's Student Center Library. For information call Bee Lee at 764-1824.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship-Graduate Chapter: All graduate students are welcome to attend a weekly Bible study, fellowship, and discussion of specific issues related to graduate students. It is held at 1410 Lawyer in College Station. Contact Diego at 823-7053 or John at 764-1857 for details.

Student Counseling Service: Walk-in counseling service available for all students of color from 1-4:30 p.m. in Henderson Hall. Call Dr. Brian K. Williams at 845-4427.

Native American Student Association: A meeting will be held at 8:30 p.m. in 404 Rudder. Anyone interested in learning Native American dance is welcome. Call Amber Clark

at 779-8214 or Sonny Spearman at 847-7309 for more information.

Society For Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth: There will be a Veena Duet at 7:30 p.m. in 201 MSC. For more information contact Govind Rengaratan at 862-4037 or 846-2733.

International Students Group: A Culturally Different Way of Reasoning workshop will be held from 5 to 6:30 p.m.

Aggie Speleological Society: Discussion of the Earth Day project and officer elections will be held at 8:30 p.m. in 202 Francis. Call Tina at 846-4191 for details.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Aggies: There will be a rap group facilitated by Larry Long of the Student Counseling service at 7 p.m. in 404 Rudder. For more information call the gayline at 847-0321.

Society of Mexican American Engineers and Scientists: Officer elections will be held at 7 p.m. in 203 Zachry. Banquet information, applications for next year chair positions and pizza will be served. For more information call Carissa at 694-8142.

International Students Group: A Culturally Different Ways of Reasoning Workshop will be held from 5 to 6:30 p.m. in 104 Henderson Hall. Contact Dr. Lin at 845-4427, ext. 145 for more information.

Environmental Issues Committee: A general meeting to discuss Earth Day plans will be held at 7 p.m. in 308 Rudder. All Aggies are welcome to attend. If an EIC member and cannot attend or for more information call Cassandra at 845-3051.

Alpha Phi Omega: Meet for the Boys Club Service Project at 3:30 p.m. in the APO office.

Academie Vampirica: There will be a general domain meeting at 7 p.m. at the Orion Ltd. For more information call Gen at 693-4434.

Friday

United Campus Ministry (UCM): All Christians are encouraged to attend this weekly Bible study. Fellowship activity will follow. Meet at A&M Presbyterian Church at 5:30 p.m. For details call Dr. Frank Yates at 846-1221.

Catholic Students Association: Grad-

uate students group weekly dinner gathering at a local restaurant will be held at 6:00 p.m. Call Bee Lee at 764-1824 for information.

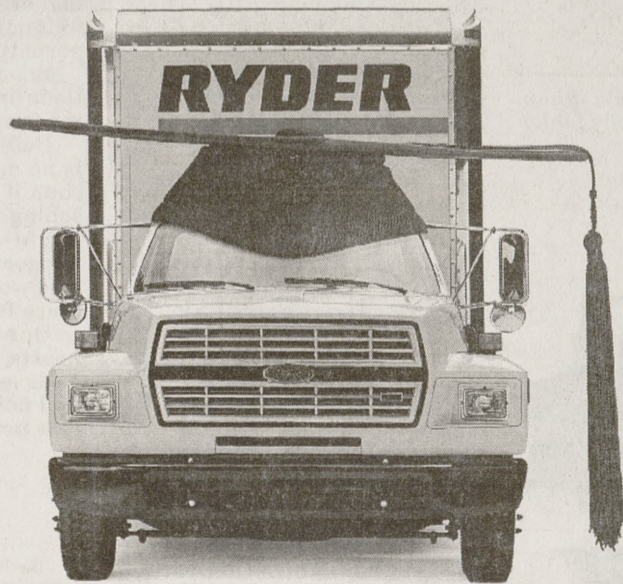
Hillel Jewish Student Organization: Friday evening Sabbath Services will be held at 8:00 p.m. at 800 George Bush Drive. Call Rabbi Peter Tarlow at 696-7313 for details.

Study Abroad Programs Office: There will be an informational meeting for students who wish to study abroad at the Texas A&M SantaChia Center in Italy Spring '97. For more information call 845-0544.

Off Campus Aggies: Dinner club will meet at 6:30 p.m. at Fuddrussers. For more information call the OCA office at 845-0688.

What's Up is a Battalion service that lists non-profit student and faculty events and activities. Items should be submitted no later than three days in advance of the desired run date. Application deadlines and notices are not events and will not be run in What's Up. If you have any questions, please call the newsroom at 845-3313.

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