



Implications of Coronavirus on the Illicit Drug Market

Intelligence Dissemination Report

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Key Finding:

Coronavirus's (2019-nCoV) effect on international trade with China is likely to impact the illicit drug market.

Details:

The spread of 2019-nCoV has negatively impacted infrastructure and reduced global trade and travel. The United States is reliant on Chinese trade for a variety of goods, including materials and items utilized in the production and distribution of illicit narcotics, such as plastics, active pharmaceutical ingredients, and drug packaging equipment.

- 88% of manufacturing sites making pharmaceutical ingredients used in the U.S. drug market were located overseas in 2018, according to the FDA.
 - This includes microcrystalline cellulose (MCC), a known binding agent used in the creation of pills.

In New Jersey, heroin is currently the most predominant illicitly used narcotic in the drug environment; it is generally packaged in wax folds otherwise known as glassine bags. Imitation prescriptions pills are also predominant, and created using equipment and materials that are manufactured abroad.

- Confidential source intelligence has reported that the depleting supply of certain chemicals, particularly binding agents that hold pressed pills together, along with wax folds/glassines, both reportedly shipped and sourced from China.
- Confidential source intelligence has indicated that illicit narcotics purchased in NJ, suspected to be heroin, have been found packaged in clear dime bags, as opposed to the traditionally used wax folds/glassines.
 - If this trend continues, it could potentially change traditional narcotics packaging along with the typical substances and adulterants found in NJ's drug environment.

National Implications

- The secondary effects of 2019-nCoV are revealing gaps in the global supply chain that are difficult to predict.
- LE should be mindful of potential changes in traditional drug trafficking patterns as well as the lack of availability of standard known packaging methods.
- LE should maintain communication with forensic labs on the presumptive testing/analysis of seized contents.

Source: Law Enforcement

Source Reliability: Completely Reliable

Contributing Agencies: NJSP OFS, NJSP HRMU, US Customs & Border Protection, & US Domestic Highway Enforcement

Dissemination: Law Enforcement

Request for Information and Contact Information: Any agency with additional information regarding this topic, or with any questions about this product, should contact the Drug Monitoring Initiative (DMI), Office of Drug Monitoring & Analysis at DMI@gw.njsp.org.