

# The Oregonian

## House votes to restrict meth ingredient

**An Oregon bill requiring prescriptions for some cold pills is expected to sail through the Senate and be signed into law**

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SALEM -- The Oregon Legislature took a major step Wednesday toward passage of a first-in-the-nation bill requiring prescriptions for cold and allergy medicines containing an ingredient used to make methamphetamine.

The House voted 55-4 to send the bill to the Senate even as legislators said they knew that many of their constituents would resent the inconvenience and expense of having to get a prescription for common drugs such as Sudafed and Claritin D.

Sponsors said they expected the measure to swiftly pass the Senate and be signed into law by Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Blake Rice, chairman of the state Board of Pharmacy, said his board planned to put the new prescription requirement in place before the next cold and flu season.

Currently, cold pills with pseudoephedrine -- the essential ingredient in meth -- can only be purchased from pharmacies after consumers show identification and sign a log. Liquid and gel products are also slated to soon be placed behind pharmacy counters.

Law enforcement officials credit those restrictions with cutting the number of meth labs in half. But sponsors of a package of bills attacking the meth epidemic said they're convinced they need tougher rules to stop all diversion to meth cooks.

"You can vote no on House Bill 2485 and assure them that people can be treated for their sniffles," said Rep. Wayne Krieger, R-Gold Beach. "You can vote yes on HB2485 and protect Oregonians and their children from the scourge of meth and give them an opportunity for a meth-free future."

"Could I lose my seat for doing the right thing?" said Rep. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, of his vote in favor of the bill. "Absolutely, and if necessary, I will."

Several legislators said in interviews that they fretted about whether it made sense to go further than any other any state in restricting access to these products. But only a handful of legislators spoke out on the floor -- and voted -- against the measure.

The most impassioned opposition came from Rep. Jeff Kropf, R-Sublimity, who said voters won't understand the complexities of the meth issue.

"What they're going to understand is: 'I'm being punished for something I didn't do,' " said Kropf, who added that the prescription requirement "goes too far beyond common sense."

Kropf noted that most of the meth in Oregon is imported from Mexican superlabs and that the real solution is turning would-be users away from meth with education and treatment.

Rep. Tom Butler, R-Ontario, raised concerns that visitors to Oregon could be arrested for carrying pseudoephedrine that wasn't purchased with a prescription.

Supporters said they doubted that would happen. Rice said it was just "common sense" that someone carrying medicine for personal use would not be arrested. He noted that there are already several prescription drugs regulated differently by various states.

Several legislators said it was important to eliminate local meth labs even if most supplies of the drug come from out of state. They said dangerous chemicals from the meth labs contaminate homes and endanger the health of children.

Rep. Jeff Barker, D-Aloha, a retired Portland police lieutenant, told of a rental van that had been turned into a meth lab. Though it was supposed to have been destroyed, he warned that some family could unknowingly have used it and had their belongings contaminated.

"We can either make pseudoephedrine a prescription drug or we can continue to see more meth labs," he said.

Rep. Bill Garrard, R-Klamath Falls, said requiring a prescription would not be a hardship for many people who can use an increasing number of alternatives. Pfizer, which makes Sudafed, already sells a version that uses another decongestant and is planning pseudoephedrine-free formulations of some other brands.

In addition, doctors would be allowed to dispense prescriptions for pseudoephedrine products over the phone, and consumers could get up to five refills in a six-month period.

The House also passed a companion measure providing money for drug treatment, and the Senate approved two other bills aimed at attacking meth. Altogether, the measures provide \$7.1 million for treatment, tougher sentences and related programs.

Rep. Gary Hansen, D-Portland, said the measures do "pathetically little for drug treatment," particularly in light of what he said were \$28 million in cuts to treatment programs paid for through the Oregon Health Plan.