DEA Will Ban Hallucinogen Known to Users as ‘Ecstasy’

By Mary Thornton
Washington Post Staff Writer

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DEA Administrator John C. Lawn said he had signed an emergency order placing the drug in the Schedule I category of drugs with the most serious potential for abuse. These include heroin and cocaine.

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“All of the evidence DEA has received shows that MDMA abuse has become a nationwide problem and that it poses a serious health threat,” Lawn said. “... This emergency action is a stopgap measure to curb MDMA abuse until the administrative process can be completed.”

A recent University of Chicago study has shown that a drug very similar to MDMA causes brain damage in laboratory animals, sometimes after a single dose. Researchers said the DEA that MDMA could be expected to cause similar damage in humans.

Gene R. Haislip, head of the DEA’s Office of Diversion Control, said the drug was available in at least 21 states and Canada and is especially popular with college students and young professionals.

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The usual dose is between 50 and 110 milligrams, officials said.

Haislip said drug-treatment authorities in California were beginning to report seeing individuals who had taken multiple doses of MDMA, with symptoms of “severe anxiety reactions, paranoia, fear, sleep problems and depression.”

MDMA, a “designer” drug, is a slightly altered copy of now illegal MDA.