

# The Dallas Morning News

## Stores stop selling medicines that contain 'cheese' ingredient

NW Dallas: Grocer sees drop in thefts after it yanks Tylenol PM

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By SERGIO CHAPA / Al Día

Note: I originally intended to write a brief about a Fiesta employee caught on security cameras doing "cheese" on his lunch break. But it was very obvious during the interview that removing Tylenol and related products from the shelves was a bigger story. This story was picked up by the AP wires, local television and national media outlets. I was interviewed twice on MSNBC.

Managers of the Fiesta supermarket at Webb Chapel Road and Lombardy Lane noticed that Tylenol PM and other drugs with the same ingredients were flying off the shelves.

But after learning that the cause was shoplifting – not brisk sales – they stopped selling the over-the-counter medicines.

Manager Dennis Daily said children as young as 12 who live in the many apartment complexes around the northwest Dallas supermarket were stealing the medicine to mix with black tar heroin to make "cheese," a deadly drug that has claimed the lives of 23 area teens since January 2005.



Mr. Daily said the supermarket has stopped selling Tylenol PM, Advil PM and some generic over-the-counter medications containing diphenhydramine hydrochloride, an antihistamine, because of widespread cheese use in the neighborhood.

Police records show almost daily arrests for and confiscations of the drug in the area, and Steve Fuentes, a community officer with the Dallas Police Department's northwest patrol, said the cheese addiction problem stubbornly persists despite efforts to raise community awareness.

"Every time we interview somebody, they tell us that everyone they know is on it," Officer Fuentes said.

Cheese heroin is snorted like cocaine. The active ingredients from Tylenol PM, Xanax or other drugs cushion users coming down from the heroin while providing a secondary high. Most fatal overdoses of cheese are attributed to the heroin, which can cause heart or respiratory failure. Diphenhydramine is known to cause liver damage.

### Shoplifting slows

Although the neighborhood surrounding the Webb Chapel Road store is believed to be at the center of the cheese problem, a Fiesta supermarket in East Oak Cliff has also stopped selling Tylenol PM.

Two others in East Dallas and Pleasant Grove have decided to put the medicine behind the counter.

"We weren't told by anybody to do it, but we did it ourselves," Mr. Daily said of his store's decision. "We didn't want to be part of the problem or anybody dying."

Some other supermarkets and drugstores, including Carnival and Walgreens locations, have restricted access to medicines that include diphenhydramine.

Mr. Daily said the decision to pull Tylenol PM and the other products did not come suddenly.

"We first took it off the shelves about a year ago and put it in a locked glass case, but the only people who were buying it were young kids," he said. "We started requiring them to be over 21 to buy it, but we decided to stop selling it after we learned more about cheese."

Although the store continues to sell Sominex and other sleep aids that contain diphenhydramine, Mr. Daily said store officials would monitor sales and shoplifting of those medications.

"If it gets to be a problem, we'll stop selling it, too," he said.

Dallas police records show that shoplifting has fallen at the Fiesta on Webb Chapel Road by more than one-third since managers pulled medicines containing diphenhydramine from the shelves.

### **Other stores watching**

At the Carnival store at Webb Chapel Road and Larga Drive, employees have placed Tylenol PM behind a secure counter; Advil PM, Sominex and other products are sold within the view of the store's pharmacist.

"Carnival is committed to satisfying the needs of customers in the communities we serve and doing so in a responsible way," vice president Poul Heilmann said in a written statement.

Carol Hively, a national spokeswoman for Walgreens, said concerns over improper use and shoplifting have prompted some Dallas-area stores to place products containing diphenhydramine behind the pharmacy counter.

State Rep. Helen Giddings, D-DeSoto, introduced – but later withdrew – legislation that would require stores to put Tylenol PM and other medicines with diphenhydramine behind their counters.

The law would have been similar to one that governs the sale of products containing pseudoephedrine, a key ingredient of methamphetamines.

But Ms. Giddings said she decided her legislation would have been too sweeping.

"There are 83 products being sold in Texas with that same drug," she said. "It would not have been practical."

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