

Cold, Flu, and Crystal Meth Season

By Reg P. Wydeven
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"In the criminal justice system, sexually based offenses are considered especially heinous. In New York City, the dedicated detectives who investigate these vicious felonies are members of an elite squad known as the Special Victims Unit. These are their stories." This is the opening of *Law & Order: SVU*, one of my favorite shows that I Tivo® every week. The show stars Mariska Hargitay, daughter of blonde bombshell Jane Mansfield, who heads the squad of New York's finest that was assembled to deal with New York's worst.

Another star of the show is rapper Ice-T, who portrays former vice squad turned SVU member Detective Tutuolo Fin. In a recent episode, Fin is in a race against time to save a baby kidnapped by a drug addict. Fin tracks the kidnapper down by tracing a wave of convenience store, supermarket and pharmacy robberies in her neighborhood where only cold medicine was stolen. New York has a law that govern the sale of cold medicine such as Sudafed, which contains pseudophedrine, a key ingredient for making methamphetamine, an illegal narcotic also known as crystal meth.

Fin catches the kidnapper swiping Sudafed red-handed, so she leads him to the missing baby at her boyfriend's house, which is also the location of his crystal meth lab. Sneaking into the kitchen, Fin notices a series of beakers and test tubes, in addition to the cold pills and a bottle of ephedrine, the main ingredient in methamphetamine, which can be bought at any gas station. From his days in vice, Fin knows he must quickly evacuate the home because the crystal meth manufacturing process can be very volatile, and one spark could result in a tremendous explosion that causes a toxic and lethal gas.

Needless to say, Fin rescued the baby, caught the bad guys and evacuated the house without causing a deadly explosion.

Like Detective Fin, police officers across Wisconsin are also becoming all too familiar with crystal meth labs. Because the crystal meth can be manufactured in a very small space with chemicals that can be easily and legally obtained, labs are sprouting up all over the Dairy State.

Methamphetamine costs about as much as cocaine or crack and has a similar high, however, it has grown in popularity among drug users because the high lasts much longer, up to six hours. Crystal meth is also highly addictive.

To help the police battle these crystal meth labs, Wisconsin's legislature has introduced a bill similar to the one in New York depicted on *Law & Order: SVU*, making it harder to purchase cold medicines containing pseudophedrine. The bill would require these cold medicines to be sold only in pharmacies and not over the counter.

To purchase cold medicines containing pseudophedrine, customers would be required to show a photo ID and sign a state registry. Customers would be limited to purchasing only nine grams of cold medicine every thirty days. This amounts to about three boxes of Sudafed.

Several other states across the country have passed similar laws regulating the purchase of cold medicines containing pseudophedrine.

Hopefully the law will pass, making it harder for criminals to create these crystal meth labs. Of course, as soon as it does, my family will probably be hit with the worst colds the Wisconsin winter can throw at us. But sneezes and runny noses are a small price to pay for keeping drugs off our streets.

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