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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**New York State Makes it Illegal to Sell or Possess Bath Salts or Synthetic Drugs**

Brewster, NY- Governor Cuomo announced on Tuesday that the New York State Department of Health has issued new regulations in response to the widespread use of “bath salts” and “synthetic marijuana” throughout the state. The new regulations provide for criminal penalties for not only the sale and distribution, but the possession of these substances as well.

“These products have been marketed as a safe and legal alternative to marijuana, but they are neither,” says Allen Beals, M.D., J.D., Commissioner of Health for Putnam County. “They are chemically related to methamphetamines and ecstasy and can cause harmful physical and psychological reactions such as violent behavior, paranoia, delusions and suicidal thoughts.” Dr. Beals goes on to state that “these drugs are responsible for markedly increased calls to state poison control hot lines and visits to emergency rooms throughout the state.”

Criminalizing the possession or sale of these items provides legal recourse to local health departments and law enforcement. Last March, in response to an Order issued by the New York State Health Commissioner, 122 locations in Putnam County were served by the Putnam County Department of Health with the Order to remove these products from shelves and stop their sale and distribution. Products were found in 2 establishments and were voluntarily removed from sale.

“Fortunately, we have not had a widespread problem with these products in Putnam County,” Commissioner Beals states. “Nonetheless, we will revisit all of these establishments, make certain the offending products are not available, and that the proprietors understand the penalties for their sale, distribution and possession.”

Dr. Beals also reports that Putnam Hospital Center in Carmel has not experienced an increase in visits to the E.R., related to these products over the past six months, unlike other healthcare facilities in New York State.

The State Health Department and the New York State Police will coordinate investigations and arrests with local law enforcement and district attorneys. New criminal penalties will include a fine up to \$500 and/or up to 15 days in jail. New civil penalties will include a fine of up to \$2,000 per violation.

The Governor announced a new toll-free hotline 1-888-99SALTS (1-888-997-2587). Individuals with information about illegal distribution of bath salts or synthetic drugs are encouraged to call this hotline. For more information visit:

<http://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/narcotic/index.htm>

The Health Department’s mission is to improve and protect the health of Putnam County residents through prevention of illness and injury. For more information, please visit our website at [www.putnamcountyny.com](http://www.putnamcountyny.com); or visit our social media sites on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/putnamhealth](http://www.facebook.com/putnamhealth) and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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