On June 2, 2016, Alaska Governor Bill Walker signed HB 125 into law,[2] which made the state the latest to limit the retail sale of dextromethorphan to consumers age 18 and older. Dextromethorphan, also known as DXM or DM, is a drug that suppresses coughs caused by common illnesses like the flu or the common cold. According to the National Institutes of Health,[3] DXM is widely found in cough syrups and other popular cold medicines such as Robitussin, NyQuil, Alka-Seltzer Plus, Mucinex, and Theraflu.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse[4] warns that DXM can be dangerous if consumed in high doses. The drug acts on the same cell receptors as hallucinogenic drugs like PCP or ketamine and can yield users highs similar to alcohol or marijuana. These highs are often accompanied by hallucinations, sensations of physical distortion, euphoric feelings, and can even lead to an addiction or dependence on the drug. The drug is also commonly mixed with alcohol or other drugs for an increased and significantly more dangerous high.

According to an FDA report[5], children 12-17 are the age group found to abuse cough and cold medicine with dextromethorphan most frequently. Restricting the retail sale of products containing dextromethorphan to those 18 and older (unless they have a prescription) is a recent, yet growing trend in some states to prevent substance abuse among minors. As of June 2016, 11 states have such laws on the books. Here’s a state-by-state overview: