

Dear Commissioner Hamburg:

Thank you for your ongoing work to protect consumers and the health of all Americans. An important part of this work is combating underage drinking. This is a duty that should be prioritized and taken very seriously both in Congress and throughout the relevant agencies within federal government. I am writing today to urge you to take action on Palcohol – a new, dangerous substance that is currently under review by the Department of Treasury’s Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau – by working together to assess the potential public health concerns that arise by combining this dangerous product with food and beverages. It is vital that consumers are aware of the risks associated with Palcohol and that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) step in immediately, before this product hits shelves this fall.

Palcohol is a powdered version of alcohol that can be consumed in several ways: it can be added to any beverage to make an instant cocktail, added to food, or snorted for the same effect of getting drunk. Alcohol in this chemical form should be considered highly hazardous especially because there are no substantive studies or research on the effects of ingesting powdered alcohol. Because so little is known about its potency, consumers are more likely to ingest inappropriate levels of alcohol that can lead to a myriad of serious health concerns and even death. According to experts at the University of Colorado, Palcohol has a high risk of abuse but also has high potential to appeal to children and teens. A 2011 study in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs showed that the number of hospitalizations of young adults ages 18-24 due to alcohol overdoses has been steadily increasing for over a decade, costing hospitals and patients hundreds of millions of dollars in hospital fees. We have witnessed tragic incidents of abuse that resulted from the consumption of new alcoholic products, such as Four Loko, that were not properly assessed for safety before they were put on the market.

Given that it is packaged in small, single serving packs, Palcohol is easy to conceal and carry into venues that prohibit alcohol. It could be brought into concerts, school dances, and sporting events and its use in these places can bring harm to not only those eating, drinking or abusing the substance, but to those around them. It is imperative that your agency works with all stakeholders as soon as possible to ensure that Palcohol does not have the same devastating effect on our youth.

I am eager to work with the FDA to better inform consumers and ensure that the health of Americans are not put at risk by any substance with a high likelihood of abuse. Given that the federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau can only judge and approve new alcohol products based on labeling and taxation, the FDA must utilize their authority to intervene when alcohol products create significant health risks. The FDA has a great deal of responsibility to protect the health of the public by assuring the safety of our food and beverage products. I ask that the FDA do its part and inform consumers of the safety of this and similar products for consumption.

Sincerely,

Charles E Schumer

United States Senator