



Organised criminal gangs in China are shipping 'legal highs' into the UK as the government attempts to control the multi-million pound trade, reports the BBC.

The investigation, carried out in China by the BBC, found that labs routinely send legal highs to the UK by courier, some of the packages are often labeled as "birthday gifts".

One lab in China sent undercover BBC journalists a package labelled as "printing ink filler" but when tested by drug testing company LGC it was found to contain ethylphenidate, clephedrone and the legal high methiopropamine.

So called legal highs, also known as new psychoactive substances (NPS), are chemicals designed to mimic the effect of illegal drugs, such as cocaine and ecstasy but because they do not contain any illegal compounds they don't fall under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act.

There has been wide spread controversy over the actual safety of legal highs and more recently chemicals such as ethylphenidate and clephedrone have been considered to be so dangerous the government has placed temporary banning order on them.

A ban on all legal highs, expected to come into place in April 2016, has been criticised by experts saying it will push the industry underground and further into the hands of criminal gangs and online sellers, like the labs in China.

"We are going to take away that safety net for people who are destroying people's lives." said Home Office minister Mike Penning on [BBC Scotland Investigates: The Deadly World of Legal Highs](#).

"A blanket (ban) will mean all these substances are illegal. We don't have to pick on particular substances, all NPS will be illegal. They can tweak the formula as much as they like, they can spend as much money as they like on these scientists doing this, but they will be illegal.

"I will be damned if I am going to sit back and let so many people's lives be destroyed when we know we are behind the curve." He said.