

Synthetic Cannabinoids – K2 or Spice

Fact Sheet

What are synthetic cannabinoids?

Synthetic cannabinoids, also known as synthetic marijuana, are chemicals that affect the CB1 and CB2 receptors to create a high similar to THC, the main active ingredient in marijuana. “Spice” and “K2” were two popular names for these products.^{1,2} Brand names now change frequently.

How is it packaged?

Synthetic cannabinoids are usually sold as dried leaves in a small bag. It is often labeled as incense, potpourri, or herbal smoking blend. It is also sold in powder form, sprayed on rolling papers, or as an e-liquid cartridge to be used in an electronic cigarette. The Children’s Hospital of Michigan Poison Control Center (PCC) has noticed the use of newer products that “claim” to be stronger. Their name contains an “X,” such as “11X,” indicating a higher potency. Package labeling often warns consumers that it is not for human consumption.



Why do people smoke synthetic cannabinoids?

The drug is smoked to get high. Since it was first sold legally at convenience stores, gas stations, and head shops, it may be thought of as a legal or “safe” high. It has also been reported that it is used as a replacement for marijuana if the user is subjected to drug testing.

Are there any dangers to smoking synthetic cannabinoids?

Yes. Patients are presenting to emergency departments with elevated heart rates and blood pressure, drowsiness, agitation, hallucinations, seizures, tremors (shaking), rhabdomyolysis, vomiting, paranoia, dangerous EKG changes, and loss of physical control.¹ Since 2011, there have been four related deaths in Michigan. The long-term health effects are not fully known.²

Who is most likely to use synthetic cannabinoids?

Most cases are among males and teens or young adults.

How many people are using synthetic cannabinoids?

In 2012, 11% of US high school seniors reported using synthetic cannabinoids in the past year.³

The Michigan PCC collects data on exposures called in by the general public and health care providers. Nationwide and in Michigan, the number of reported synthetic cannabinoid exposures grew substantially in 2011 (US = 6,995 and Mich. = 224 respectively); however, reporting has decreased since July 2012. In 2012, there were 5,205 cases in the US⁴ and 280 in Michigan.

Is it illegal?

In October 2010, seven synthetic cannabinoids were made illegal in Michigan with penalties similar to marijuana possession.⁵ In 2012, Michigan amended the Public Health Code to create a general class ban on numerous additional synthetic cannabinoids.⁶ Products that contain one or more of these chemicals are illegal. However, as new formulas or versions of these drugs are marketed, they may contain chemicals not covered by the current law.

What if I have more questions?

The Michigan PCC is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to answer medical questions or concerns related to poisoning events. The PCC Help Hotline is **1-800-222-1222**.

References:

1. <http://www.poisoncentertampa.org/resources/1/substances/Spice-e-K2.pdf>
2. <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/abuse/index.htm>
3. <http://monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/mtf-overview2012.pdf>
4. https://aapcc.s3.amazonaws.com/files/library/Synthetic_Marijuana_Data_for_Website_4.30.2013.pdf
5. <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-333-7212>
6. <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2011-2012/publicact/pdf/2012-PA-0183.pdf>

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