



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SYNTHETIC DRUGS

WHAT ARE SYNTHETIC DRUGS?

A SYNTHETIC DRUG, ALSO REFERRED TO AS A DESIGNER DRUG, IS A CHEMICAL INTENDED TO IMITATE THE PROPERTIES AND EFFECTS OF A KNOWN HALLUCINOGEN OR NARCOTIC AND MAY HAVE UNKNOWN SIDE EFFECTS OR CAUSE AN ADVERSE REACTION. THESE DRUGS ARE CREATED IN ORDER TO EVADE RESTRICTIONS AGAINST ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES.

ARE SYNTHETIC DRUGS LEGAL IN TEXAS?

No. Under state law, it is a crime to manufacture, deliver or possess a synthetic drug.

WHAT ARE SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS?

Synthetic cannabinoids are commonly referred to as K2, Kush, Spice, synthetic marijuana and fake weed. They are a mix of plant matter sprayed with chemicals in sometimes dangerously high proportions, falsely marketed as "legal highs" and smoked like marijuana.

WHERE ARE SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS SOLD?

Synthetic cannabinoids are relatively inexpensive and sold in convenience stores, smoke shops, novelty stores, on the internet and on the street.

WHAT DOES THE PACKAGING OF SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS LOOK LIKE?

Many of the products are sold in colorful packets with names that appeal to adolescents and young adults. Manufacturers label the packages as "not for human consumption" and market the products as incense or potpourri to mask the intended purpose and to avoid regulatory oversight of the manufacturing process. You can view examples of the packaging on page 3.

ARE SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS DANGEROUS?

Synthetic cannabinoids are illegal, dangerous, highly addictive and potentially deadly. One of the original chemists who designed synthetic

cannabis for research purposes, John Huffman, Ph.D., likened recreational use of synthetic drugs to playing Russian roulette. The contents and effects of synthetic cannabinoids are unpredictable due to a constantly changing variety of chemicals used in manufacturing processes devoid of quality controls and government regulatory oversight.





HOW ARE SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS MANUFACTURED?

Synthetic cannabinoids are man-made chemicals produced in underground labs, often in China, and then shipped to the United States in powder or crystal form. They are then mixed with acetone and sprayed onto plant material manually before packaging. Ingredients are usually not listed on the packages sold, so there's no telling which of the hundreds of different synthetic cannabinoid variants are inside the bags. That great unknown makes it very difficult for health professionals to diagnose and treat patients in emergency cases who have ingested synthetic drugs.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL HEALTH EFFECTS FROM SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS?

- ◆ Paranoia, anxiety, psychosis, agitation, hallucinations and suicidal thoughts
- ◆ Nausea, vomiting, rapid heartbeat, dilated pupils, elevated blood pressure, tremors and seizures
- ◆ Death

WHO USES SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS?

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 60 percent of individuals admitted to an emergency department for their reported synthetic cannabinoid use are between 12 and 20 years of age, with 40 percent in the 18-20 age group and 20 percent in the 12-17 age bracket. The drugs have gained popularity in Texas and across the country, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers. In 2015, it received nearly 8,000 calls regarding synthetic cannabinoids.

Synthetic Cannabinoid Calls Made to Poison Control Centers American Association of Poison Control Centers

YEAR	NUMBER
2011	6,968
2012	5,230
2013	2,668
2014	3,682
2015	7,779

ARE SYNTHETIC DRUGS A PROBLEM IN TEXAS?

Yes. From January 1, 2016, through the end of November 2016, Texas registered the second most number of synthetic cannabinoid-related calls (266) to poison control centers in the U.S. In Houston, emergency responders blamed synthetic cannabinoids for around 1,400 of the 3,000 overdose calls they handled over a ten-month period, including a mass overdose of 16 people in one afternoon in Hermann Park.

WHAT IS THE TEXAS OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL DOING ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS?

In 2016, the Consumer Protection Division (CPD) of the Texas Attorney General's office sent 200 warning letters to smoke shops in the Houston area, notifying them that the agency will aggressively pursue any person or business involved in the sale of dangerous synthetic cannabinoids. To date, the CPD has filed 14 lawsuits to block the sale of synthetic cannabinoids in Texas. Permanent injunctions have been granted in the following cases:



- ◆ Katz Boutique and its nine smoke shop/ adult novelty boutiques where synthetic cannabinoids were sold from 2013-2015. \$1,175,000 in penalties and attorneys' fees were awarded.
- ◆ Jam's Smoke Shop. A jury verdict awarded \$878,000 in penalties and \$33,000 in attorneys' fees.

In August 2016, the owners of Spice Boutique were arrested, and over \$2 million in cash and gold bars were seized by law enforcement authorities.



WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF SOMEONE HAS USED SYNTHETIC DRUGS?

Call your local poison center at **1-800-222-1222**. Experts can help you decide whether someone can be treated at home, or whether he or she must go to a hospital.

Dial 9-1-1 immediately if someone:

- ◆ Stops breathing
- ◆ Collapses
- ◆ Has a seizure

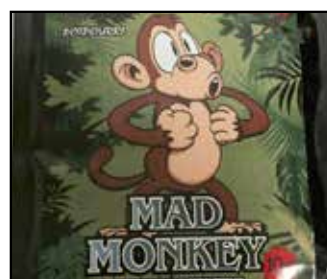
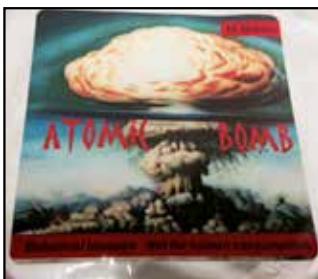
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP PREVENT THE USE OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS?

- ◆ Learn more about synthetic drugs.
- ◆ Talk with your children about the adverse effects of synthetic drugs.
- ◆ Work with your children's schools to provide educational programs about the adverse effects of synthetic drugs.
- ◆ Contact the Texas Attorney General's office if you suspect synthetic drug activity in a company's business by calling our toll-free Consumer Protection Hotline at **(800) 621-0508**.

USEFUL NUMBERS

Office of the Attorney General Consumer Protection Division **(512) 463-2185**

Office of the Attorney General Consumer Protection Hotline	(800) 621-0508
Poison Control	(800) 222-1222
Emergency	9-1-1





RESOURCES

American Association of Poison Control Centers synthetic cannabinoid data: <http://www.aapcc.org/alerts/synthetic-cannabinoids/>.

"Spice, Bath Salts, and Behavioral Health," a publication from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

<http://search.usa.gov/search/docs?affiliate=samhsa-store&dc=1415&query=Synthetic+Cannabinoids>.

"Addressing the Designer Drug Problem":

<http://www.naag.org/assets/files/pdf/nagtri/public-health-law-papers/Stein.Addressing%20The%20Designer%20Drug%20Problem.pdf>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/14/nyregion/zombielike-state-was-caused-by-synthetic-marijuana.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share>

A new study offers the first detailed look at a drug that has caused dozens to overdose and offers a window into the evolving world of synthetic drugs:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/14/nyregion/zombielike-state-was-caused-by-synthetic-marijuana.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share>

American Association of Poison Control Centers synthetic cannabinoid data:

<http://www.aapcc.org/alerts/synthetic-cannabinoids/>

Drug Enforcement Administration:

<http://www.justice.gov/dea/divisions/hq/2013/hq062613.shtml>

National Institute on Drug Abuse:

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/infofacts/Spice.html>

Congressional Research Service:

<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42066.pdf>

National Conference of State Legislators:

<http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/justice/synthetic-drug-threats.aspx>

