

Synthetic Marijuana

Spice/K2

This report was prepared by Southwest Prevention & Education Services as a quick reference guide to Synthetic Marijuana (Spice, K2, etc.). For additional information please view the other downloads on our website: www.southwestprevention.com.

Also, visit our FAQ page for more info on SPICE

A new trend emerging in Southern Utah, and all over the nation, is an increasing number of youth using an herb-based product to get high. Unlike marijuana, this “spice” is legal to purchase and use.

Facts:

- Mimics the effects of Marijuana; gives users a marijuana-like high when smoked.
- Many different herb-based products can be used, and then sprayed with a number of different cannabinoid chemicals.
- Very popular among teens who use it as an alternative to marijuana to avoid a positive drug test, bypass the dangers of being arrested, and to increase their high.
- Similar to the street price of marijuana, but it’s legal to buy.
- Can be purchased at gas stations, head shops and online. (6 confirmed businesses are currently selling this drug in Southern Utah).
- Marketed as incense, packaging actually reads “not for human consumption”. This is a loophole used to sell it legally.
- Some states and locales have passed laws to ban the sale and use of this substance, and some prosecutors in Utah are charging defendants with possession or use of a psychotoxic chemical. But few “official” ordinances have been passed in Southern Utah regarding this drug.
- Police agencies in Southern Utah report a sharp increase in the number of teens found using this drug.
- ER presentations for negative side effects after using the drug have increased greatly in Southern Utah.

Appearance:

- Synthetic marijuana is often sold in small foil packets or glass capsules similar to lip balm jars.

Photo: www.corkin.com



“Spice” typically looks like an herbal substance. The chemical is usually sprayed on, so any smokeable plant material can be used.

Photo courtesy of Dixie State College Campus Police



This brand of synthetic marijuana, labeled as “Black Mamba”, was taken from a student at Dixie State College.

Health Care Facilities and ER’s have seen a steep spike in cases – mostly teenagers – presenting at the ER with such symptoms as heart palpitations and respiratory issues due to the use of these products. One local health care worker stated “we have had a ton of people coming into the ER here lately. They always complain of severe stomach pains. They describe it as feeling like an ulcer. They also say that they get a migraine whenever they use it, and frequent use is usually accompanied by diarrhea and other flu-like symptoms.”

Dried herb, vegetable and plant matter is sprayed with the chemical synthetic THC, the psychoactive constituent of marijuana.





Packaging is often appealing to adolescents. This website boasts only selling “the highest quality and highest potency... legal buds, and spice products. ...let the aroma spice up your life! ...Not intended to provide legal ways to get high, but who’s to say what you will use it for.” (www.magicblends.com)



One packet of a shipment of 1,500 detained at an express parcel service in Ohio. Plant material laced with Spice Cannabinoid

How Synthetic Marijuana is Used/Abused:

- Usually smoked in a pipe, or through a bong or Hookah.
- Sometimes smoked as a cigarette.
- Because it burns quickly, it is rarely smoked as a blunt or baked.

The Effects of Synthetic Marijuana:

Because there has been little research on the long term use of this drug our knowledge about the effects are limited. Since these products are not regulated there is no way of knowing how large a dose a smoker is getting, and since the products are not made in a controlled environment, and it can be difficult to determine the chemical make-up or the amounts and potency, it is hard to determine with any accuracy how damaging the potential harmful affects will be.

Synthetic Cannabinoids found in Spice have similar effects in humans as tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main active ingredient of marijuana. Behavioral pharmacology studies show that these compounds have THC-like activity in animals. “In mice, it decreases overall activity, produces analgesia, decreases body temperature and produces catalepsy [a nervous condition characterized by muscular rigidity and fixity of posture regardless of external stimuli, as well as decreased sensitivity to sensory and emotional experience,]” (Drug Enforcement Administration Office of Forensic Sciences, Washington, D.C. 2009).

A study published in the Journal of Mass Spectrometry (2008) on the effects on humans reported considerable reddening of the conjunctivae (white part of the eye,) a significant increase of pulse rates, xerostomia, and an alteration of mood and perception, all within 10 minutes of consumption. “The effects continued for about 6 hours under slow attenuation. The whole next day, some minor after-effects were still noticeable,” (JMS Letter, December 2008).

Local users report a high similar to marijuana, but more intense, and only lasting a short period of time. They also report hallucinogen-like effects, including paranoia.

DRUG AGENT TESTIMONY

”Stores take advantage of a loophole in the law: They claim that they are not selling the drug for people to get high... they claim that they are selling it as incense. However, the drug does not emit a fragrant smell; it smells like chemical and causes a headache almost immediately. It’s very obvious that there is only one use for this substance and that is to get high. This is further evidenced by the fact that it is packaged and marketed to look ‘FUN’.

”In addition, we have already made arrests of store employees who have come right out and admitted that they sell this substance for the purpose of getting high. In fact, one recent arrest in Southern Utah resulted after a store employee told an undercover narcotics agent exactly how much of the substance to smoke to get a particular high, and warned about smoking too much because it would, ‘really mess you up.’

”So don’t be fooled by stores saying that they are selling this as incense. That’s their attempt at trying to find a loophole that will allow them to sell a substance they know is being used as a drug.”

- Local Task Force Agent.

Commonly Reported Side Effects/Signs of Use:

- Extreme, migraine-like headaches, sometimes lasting for hours. (Most teenage users report these headaches every time they use the drug.)
- Diarrhea and other flu-like symptoms. Diarrhea is noted among users within a few days of use, and flu-like symptoms become prevalent shortly after.
- Extreme stomach pains & vomiting.
- Hallucinations & Delusions.
- Anxiety, elevated heart rate and blood pressure, seizures.
- Poor sleep, pale skin, memory loss.
- Obviously the many negative consequences of inhaling particulates into the lungs will apply to this smoked product; perhaps even more so than tobacco from cigarettes since filters are not always used when smoking spice.

Signs of Use:

- Glassy, red eyes.
- Diarrhea
- Stomach Pains
- Use of incense, colognes and/or perfumes to mask the chemical and smoke smell.
- Memory loss/forgetfulness
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Paraphernalia (if you find paraphernalia in your house or in your kids possession it is VERY likely they are using.
- Loss of interest or motivation.
- Trouble sleeping, erratic dreams, hallucinations, etc.

Addictive Potential:

Use of "Spice" has linked with signs of addiction syndrome. Researchers have demonstrated dependence Syndrome and physical withdrawal syndrome to synthetic marijuana closely resembling that seen in cannabis dependence. One case study, for example, followed a 20-year-old patient who smoked "Spice" daily for 8 months. "He developed tolerance and rapidly increased the dose... He felt a continuous desire for the drug and kept on using it despite the development of persistent cognitive impairment... On hospital days 4-7 [of not using the drug,] he developed inner unrest, drug craving, nocturnal nightmares, profuse sweating, nausea, tremor, and headache. His blood pressure was elevated for two days, with a maximal value of 180/90 mm Hg accompanied by a heart rate of 125/min," (Zimmerman et al., Dtsch Arztebl Int. 2009 July; 106(27): 464-467.)

Common Slang Terms:

- Spice
- K2
- Black Mamba
- Jamaican Breeze
- Diamond
- Diamond Spirit
- Dragon Spice
- Mojo
- Genie
- Serenity Now
- Synergy
- Black Magic Smoke
- Red X Dawn
- Spike 99
- Super Nova
- Texas Gold
- Purple Flake
- Demon
- KIND
- Spice Gold
- Spice Silver
- King Krypto
- Fake Weed

YOUTH TESTIMONY:

A 15-year-old male who was recently caught using Spice said this about side effects and the addictive potential of the substance: "Yes, the side effects are almost immediate. You get a headache almost instantly. Within a few days you get the runs really bad and stomach aches... And I started having really crazy dreams and scary hallucinations, which I never got from smoking weed.

"It's way more addicting than pot. I smoked pot for a long time and never had withdrawals like I did after smoking Spice for just a few weeks."

"Most kids get it from the head shops, like the one just down the street, [referring to a smoke shop in Washington County]. Or some of them buy it from kids who make it. I took my uncles credit card and bought the ingredients online. Then I would make it and sell it to other kids."

"It's really popular. Tons of kids don't even smoke marijuana anymore, its all about Spice. And it's everywhere. I know of a ton of kids that are using it."

"It's really nasty stuff. I can't wait until they make it illegal. It's so bad, there is no way it should be legal."

- 15-year-old male from Southern Utah.

Paraphernalia:



Pipes like this one, confiscated by Campus Police at Dixie State College, are sometimes used to smoke Spice.



These pipes and bongs were confiscated by local law enforcement officers. Paraphernalia like these are often used to smoke Spice.



Spice is burnt in a pipe similar to this one. The smoke is then inhaled through the pipe. Picture from www.tdn.com/news/local



Grinders such as this are sometimes used to grind up Spice before it is burnt. Picture from www.neardark.de