



Virginia Department of Health
DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY

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Frequently asked Questions about “Spice” or Synthetic Cannabinoids

What is “Spice” or synthetic cannabinoids?

Spice is an herbal product sold as incense and can be purchased on the internet, at gas stations, convenience stores, tobacco shops, and drug paraphernalia shops. Although the product is often sold as incense and labeled “not for human consumption”, it is being marketed to teenagers and young adults who want to experience a “high” effect, thought to be similar to that of marijuana.

How is “Spice” packaged?

Spice is generally packaged as small packets of dried plant or herbal material. It may look like potpourri or crushed dried oregano.

What are other common names for this product?

Since Spice was first reported in Europe, it has been sold under other names that include K2, Spice Gold, Skunk, Genie, fake marijuana, synthetic marijuana, and others.

How is “Spice” similar to marijuana?

One or more chemically engineered compounds used to make “Spice” will produce psychoactive effects similar that caused by the active ingredient (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, abbreviated THC) in marijuana. The chemically engineered compounds that are present in “Spice” include JWH-018, JWH-073, JWH-200, CP-47,497, and cannabicyclohexanol. These compounds share pharmacological similarities with THC.

Are synthetic cannabinoids safer than marijuana since it is available in stores and on the internet?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has not approved synthetic cannabinoids for human consumption. Synthetic cannabinoids have been developed over the last 30 years for research purposes to investigate the cannabinoid system. No legitimate non-research uses have been identified for these compounds.

What are the health risks of using “Spice” or synthetic cannabinoids?

Inhaling or consuming a substance that contains synthetic cannabinoids may cause agitation, anxiety, vomiting, an abnormally rapid heart beat, elevated blood pressure,

tremor or jitterness, seizures, hallucinations, and non-responsiveness. Other risks that have been reported by clinicians include psychotic episodes, withdrawal, depression, and dependency issues associated with use of these synthetic cannabinoids. Individuals who have smoked a “Spice” product have also reported intense hallucinations.

These products vary in the composition and concentration of synthetic cannabinoids. Additional adverse health effects may be associated with higher doses of synthetic cannabinoids.

Using “Spice” has resulted in numerous emergency room visits.

What are health officials doing to monitor the use of synthetic cannabinoids?

As of December 2010, the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) received over 2700 calls, mostly from emergency department staff, regarding the use of synthetic cannabinoids. In 2010, the Virginia Poison Control Center received approximately 50 calls regarding the use of synthetic cannabinoids.

If you think you or a friend has been exposed to a product containing synthetic cannabinoids, please call the Virginia Poison Center at 800-222-1222.

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Sample photo:

