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Spice (Synthetic Marijuana) Frequently Asked Questions

What is Spice?

“Spice” is a generic name for a form of synthetic marijuana that consists of herbal mixtures sprayed with chemicals made in a laboratory that produce mind-altering effects similar to cannabis. These chemicals vary widely and are constantly being changed; as such, their nature and health effects are unknown and are difficult to predict. Easy access and the misperception that Spice is “natural” and therefore harmless have likely contributed to its popularity. Another selling point is that the chemicals used in Spice are not easily detected in standard drug tests.

How does Spice affect the brain?

The chemicals found in Spice are called synthetic cannabinoids. They attach to the same nerve cell receptors as THC, the main mind-altering ingredient in marijuana. Some of the chemicals in Spice, however, attach to those receptors more strongly than THC, which could lead to a much stronger and more unpredictable effect. Additionally, there are many chemicals that remain unidentified in products sold as Spice and it is therefore not clear how they may affect the user. More than 100 different synthetic cannabinoids have been created.

Is Spice illegal?

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has designated the five active chemicals most frequently found in Spice as Schedule I controlled substances, making it illegal to sell, buy, or possess them. Spice manufacturers attempt to evade these legal restrictions by substituting different chemicals in their mixtures; as such, the DEA continues to monitor the chemistry of Spice products and update the associated list of banned cannabinoids.

How are Spice products consumed?

Spice is usually consumed by smoking. It is sometimes mixed with marijuana or is prepared as herbal infusion for drinking.

How do I recognize Spice products?

Spice is sold in attractive colorful packages, sometimes featuring cartoon characters, and is referred to by various names including "K2," "Spice," "Zero Gravity," "Chronic Spice," "Spice Gold," "Stinger," "Yucatan Fire," "Skunk," "Pulse," "Black Mamba," "Mr. Nice Guy," "Spicylicious," "K3," "Earthquake," or "Genie." New versions continue to appear on the market because manufacturers change their chemical compounds to circumvent existing laws. The herbal mixture in Spice packets resembles a potpourri and products are often sold as incense. Packing of Spice products, and websites on which they are sold, are sometimes associated with warning labels like "NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION," even though the products are marketed purely for that use.

What are the signs and symptoms of Spice toxicity or overdose?

- Severe agitation and anxiety
- Fast/racing heartbeat, high blood pressure
- Nausea and vomiting
- Muscle spasms, seizures, and tremors
- Intense hallucinations and psychotic episodes
- Confusion and non-responsiveness
- Suicidal and other harmful thoughts/actions
- In some cases, Spice has been linked to heart attacks and deaths
- Withdrawal symptoms and addiction among regular users

Where can I find help?

- **Call 911 immediately if someone stops breathing, collapses, or has a seizure.** These symptoms can be life threatening and require immediate medical attention.
- **Call the Alaska Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.** Poison experts can help you decide if someone can be treated at home or should go to the hospital. Poison Centers are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- **Call your personal physician.**
- **Call Alaska Careline at 877-266-HELP (4357).** A free and confidential 24/7 crisis intervention hotline for Alaskans experiencing a substance abuse, suicide or mental health emergency.
- Reach out to a substance abuse or mental health treatment provider who can support you or your loved one on the road to wellbeing.
 - Call Alaska 2-1-1 or go the website to locate substance abuse treatment services in your area: <http://alaska211.org/>.
 - [Treatment locator](#) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for public and private resources
 - [Seeking Substance Abuse Treatment: Know What to Ask](#) from NIDA
 - [What is Substance Abuse Treatment? A Booklet for Families](#) from SAMHSA

More information is available at: www.epi.alaska.gov