

Get the Facts About Synthetic Marijuana

<http://www.epi.alaska.gov/injury/sa/spice/default.htm>



Spice use across the United States has been associated with medical emergencies and deaths. Starting in July 2015, Anchorage began experiencing an alarming spike in emergency responses associated with spice. This fact sheet is meant to overview what spice is, why it's harmful, and where Alaskans can get help and information.

Spice is unpredictable

Spice is a form of synthetic marijuana that consists of herbal mixtures sprayed with manufactured chemicals and designed to produce mind-altering effects. Some chemicals in spice resemble THC, the natural cannabinoid found in marijuana, but they are not natural and are not regulated. There's no way to know what's in any given spice product. The effects can vary widely and can be unpredictable.

Spice is neither natural, nor harmless

"Spice" refers to a particular brand or package, but the word "spice" has become the generic word for any synthetic cannabinoid products, whatever their street name or packaging. Easy access, low cost and the misperception that spice is natural and therefore harmless have likely contributed to its popularity. Some people also choose to use it because the chemicals in spice are not easily detected in standard drug tests. Others have used spice without realizing it because it can be rolled in a cigarette or joint like marijuana.

Don't let the packaging fool you

Spice is often sold as incense in attractive colorful packages, sometimes with cartoon characters, with names like K2, fake weed, moon rocks, skunk, zero gravity, King Kong, Godzilla, K2, great ape, and gorilla. Sometimes it is repackaged in Ziploc bags or as individual cigarettes. Spice is not safe, whatever the branding, and has been associated with harmful effects on users in Alaska and throughout the country. People who use spice have developed moderate to severe health consequences. In some cases, spice has been linked to heart attacks and deaths.

Spice is different than marijuana

Though it's a synthetic cannabinoid, spice is not the same as marijuana. Spice is designed to produce a mild high, but the effects can be much more unpredictable than those of marijuana, even life-threatening. Severe signs and symptoms include:

- Extreme anxiety and paranoia
- Immobilization
- Muscle spasms, tremors and seizures
- Suicidal thoughts
- Vomiting
- Hallucinations
- Rapid heart rate and increased blood pressure
- Confusion and unconsciousness

Getting help

If you, or someone you suspect of using spice, experiences symptoms such as seizures, difficulty breathing, chest pain, altered mental status, or nausea and vomiting, seek medical attention immediately or call 911.

If you are unsure about mild symptoms, call the Alaska Poison Control Center at (800)-222-1222 or contact a personal physician for guidance.

If you or someone you know is currently abusing spice, call (800) 770-3930 to get help quitting.

