

## What are synthetic cannabinoids?

Synthetic cannabinoids are sold over the counter and via the internet as herbal incense products. They often come in the form of dried leaves, resin or smokable powders and are commonly abused for their psychoactive properties.

Synthetic cannabinoids are chemicals that cause similar effects to the psychoactive chemicals found naturally in the cannabis (marijuana) plant. While they are often referred to as “fake weed,” in reality they can have very different effects from marijuana and may have a potency 28 times greater than the active ingredients (such as tetrahydrocannabinol or cannabidiol) in marijuana.

### Synthetic cannabinoids go by several names:

- K2
- Demon
- JWH
- Spice
- Spice Diamond
- Spice of Life
- 2Spicy
- Chill X

## How are synthetic cannabinoids prepared, and how are they used?

There are more than 140 different compounds classified as synthetic cannabinoids. They are often prepared by mixing one or more of them with plant material to simulate the look and feel of the marijuana plant.

Like marijuana, synthetic cannabinoids are used mainly by smoking. Sometimes synthetic cannabinoids are mixed with marijuana or prepared as an herbal infusion for drinking. As these products are illegal, there is no way to know the composition, quality, dose, purity, or potential contaminants that may be present.

## Why do people use Synthetic Cannabinoids?

Synthetic Cannabinoids are used as recreational drugs of abuse for their reported THC-like effects. While they are marketed as “legal highs,” they are actually illegal to possess.

## How do synthetic cannabinoids affect people?

Initial symptoms from exposure to these products occur within of 5 to 10 minutes and typically resolve within 6 hours but can persist for up to 24 hours. Due to the variety of products available and the lack of quality control measures, symptoms are unpredictable. Symptoms can range from agitation, paranoia, and severe hallucinations to suicidal thoughts/actions, heart attacks and in severe cases, death.

Synthetic cannabinoids have some effects that are similar to marijuana, including elevated mood, relaxation, and altered perception. However, the effects can last longer and be more potent.

# Synthetic Cannabinoids

There are also some other effects that aren't typically experienced with marijuana use, including high blood pressure, palpitations (irregular heart beat), chest pain, kidney injury, seizures, unconsciousness, and psychotic effects such as paranoia, anxiety, hallucinations and aggression.

## Can synthetic cannabinoids be fatal?

**Yes.** There are reports of deaths associated with the use of these illegal drugs.

## Are there any long-term effects associated with the use of synthetic cannabinoids?

**Yes.** Both addiction and withdrawal symptoms have been reported after long-term use of synthetic cannabinoids.

## If I take a small amount, can I avoid the bad effects?

**No.** There is no safe dose of these drugs, and there is no quality control in terms of the manufacture of these substances. Illicit drugs often contain other chemicals that can cause their own side effects that may be life threatening. There is no "safe" street drug, and there is no safe dose of street drugs.

## What should I do if I have a bad reaction after using synthetic cannabinoids?

If you or anybody you know feels ill after using these drugs, please go to a health care facility for further evaluation, as symptoms may be life-threatening. There are medications that can be given to help treat some of these symptoms.

Also, the Poison and Drug Information Service (PADIS) is a free, confidential 24/7 service for all Albertans. Staff are specially trained in the assessment and management of exposures to drugs and toxins like synthetic cannabinoids and are available by calling 1-800-332-1414.

If anybody who has used these drugs exhibits unusually severe aggression or attempts self-harm, has a seizure, experiences chest pain, becomes unconscious, stops breathing, or experiences any other severe reactions, please call 911 immediately.

**If you are concerned about your own drug or alcohol use, the drug and/or alcohol use of a friend or loved one, or would simply more information on drug and alcohol use, contact the Addiction & Mental Health 24 Hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.**