

Quick Facts on Synthetic Drugs

Synthetic Marijuana (Cannabinoids)

Poisonings are on the rise

- Synthetic marijuana exposures in Texas increased 169% in 2014 over 2013.¹
- Emergency cases are appearing 4 times as often in 2015 than 2014 nation-wide, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers.²

Youth are target consumers

- Young adults and adolescents are the primary users.³ Use is also prevalent among people with marijuana habits who are evading drug tests ordered routinely by work or parole.
- 45% of local synthetic marijuana poisonings are under age 20, and 77% are male.¹
- Synthetic marijuana is the 3rd most used drug among Houston-area teens.⁴ (Marijuana #1, prescription drugs #2, synthetic marijuana #3.)
- 10% of Houston-area high school students have used synthetic drugs at least once in their lifetime.⁴ 5% of U.S. high school students have used synthetic drugs in the last year.⁵
- The average age of first use by youth is 14 years old, in Region 6 and Texas-wide.³

Designer Drugs

- Synthetic drugs are unregulated, untested, and highly potent. Drug manufacturers change the chemical compositions frequently to avoid laws.
- Designer drugs are marketed as “legal highs” and sold by retailers without age restrictions.
- Synthetic drugs are not the same as the drugs they copy. Their effects and addictiveness can be much more severe than what purchasers expect.
- Effects of designer drugs are extreme anxiety, violent behavior and delusions, temporary or persistent psychosis, hallucinations, rapid fever, racing heartbeat, stroke, and death.²⁻³
- Clinicians should keep synthetic drugs in mind when evaluating emergency psychiatric symptoms.³
- As of September 1, 2015 it is illegal in Texas to sell, use, or possess synthetic drugs.

More Information

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/ondcp-fact-sheets/synthetic-drugs-k2-spice-bath-salts>

¹ Texas Poison Center Network, 2010-2014.

² New York Times. Potent ‘spice’ drug fuels rise in visits to emergency room. April 24, 2015.

³ Weaver et al. Designer Drugs 2015: Assessment and management. Addiction Science & Clinical Practice 10:8.

⁴ Texas School Survey 2014. Texas A&M University and Texas Department of State Health Services.

⁵ Monitoring the Future 2014. University of Michigan and National Institute on Drug Abuse.