

Synthetic Cannabinoids Frequently Asked Questions for Consumers

What are synthetic cannabinoids?

Synthetic cannabinoids are a large family of chemically unrelated structures that are synthesized and marketed to mimic the action of Δ 9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the primary psychoactive constituent of marijuana. Marijuana is listed as a Schedule I controlled substances in New York State. Schedule I controlled drugs are the most highly restricted drugs in New York and are not legal for sale to the public. Other examples of Schedule I controlled substances include heroin and LSD.

How are synthetic cannabinoids packaged?

They are sold as incense, herbal mixtures, or potpourri with a variety of names including, but not limited to “K2,” “Spice,” “Mr. Nice Guy,” and “Galaxy Gold” They often carry a “not for human consumption” label in order to disguise the true purpose of the substance.

What are the dangerous effects of synthetic cannabinoid abuse?

The most common adverse effects that have been reported include tachycardia (increased heart rate), paranoid behavior, agitation, irritability, nausea and vomiting, confusion, drowsiness, headache, hypertension, electrolyte abnormalities, seizures and syncope (loss of consciousness). Severe side effects may include acute renal failure and significant negative effects to the cardiovascular and central nervous systems. Use of synthetic cannabinoids has also been linked to death. Synthetic cannabinoids do not show up on a urine drug screen as THC.

What is the legal status of synthetic cannabinoids in New York State?

Effective March 28, 2012 these compounds are prohibited from sale and distribution pursuant to an Order for Summary Action signed by the Commissioner of Health. This Order includes the five types of synthetic cannabinoids banned by the Drug Enforcement Administration on March 1, 2011.

Who is abusing synthetic cannabinoids?

Reports to New York Poison Control Centers indicate use in the teen and young adult population. The products are used to mimic the effects of marijuana.

How big is the problem?

Nationwide, calls to Poison Control Centers regarding instances of poisoning from products containing synthetic cannabinoids increased more than 200 percent from 2010 to 2011.

Why the concern?

There has been a rapid and significant increase in abuse of these substances in the United States. These substances have the potential to be extremely harmful due to their high potency, severe adverse effects and a mistaken belief that they are a safe, legal alternative to marijuana. Therefore, pose an imminent hazard to public safety.

How may I contact the Poison Control Center?

The Poison Control Center can be reached at (800)222-1222.