



SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS – FAQ

Q. What are synthetic cannabinoids?

A. Synthetic cannabinoids are chemicals that are sprayed onto dried plant material so it can be smoked. They may also be sold as liquids to be used in e-cigarettes and other devices. These products often go by the names K2, Spice, Black Mamba, Kush, Kronik, and others. They are also marketed as herbal or liquid incense. Synthetic cannabinoids are often believed to be a safe alternative to marijuana, but they are not.

Q. Are synthetic cannabinoids legal?

A. Synthetic cannabinoids are illegal. Illinois has banned general categories of ingredients. Makers of synthetic cannabinoids try to get around these laws by creating new products with different ingredients or by labeling them “not for human consumption.”

Q. What are the dangers of using synthetic cannabinoids?

A. Synthetic cannabinoids are often believed to be a relatively safe alternative to marijuana. However, they can cause severe illness and even death. Synthetic cannabinoids can cause hallucinations, seizures, breathing problems, heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, and others.

Q. Why are people bleeding? Are the synthetic cannabinoids we are seeing in Illinois laced with rat poison?

A. Several individuals who used synthetic cannabinoids experienced severe bleeding and have tested positive for a chemical often used in rat poison (brodifacoum). While synthetic cannabinoids in general are dangerous, the severe bleeding seen in these cases is consistent with someone who has been exposed to rat poison.

Q. Is there a specific type of synthetic cannabinoids being used in Illinois that is causing people to bleed?

A. Many different synthetic cannabinoids have been associated with bleeding. Some people use many different brands of products obtained from different locations. There are no standards for making, packaging, or selling synthetic cannabinoid chemicals, which means that two packets of a brand-named product may have completely different chemicals.

Q. Where are people getting these synthetic cannabinoids?

A. Synthetic cannabinoids are found throughout Illinois and across the country in convenience stores, smoke shops, gas stations, individual drug dealers, or online as incense or natural herbal products. Arrests have been made in Chicago in connection with synthetic cannabinoids, and additional locations could be implicated.

Q. How many more cases will we see?

A. Additional cases continue to be reported to IDPH and it is not known how many more cases we will see or for how long we will see them. Synthetic cannabinoids are an unregulated product so there is no oversight of manufacturing or distribution.

Q. What should people do if they use synthetic cannabinoids and get sick?

A. People who have used a synthetic cannabinoids and have severe bleeding should call 911 or have someone take them to a hospital emergency department immediately. People should not use synthetic cannabinoids.

Q. Have there been previous outbreaks associated with synthetic cannabinoids?

A. Across the country there have been outbreaks related to synthetic cannabinoids. However, this outbreak appears to be linked to a contaminant, which has not been reported before.