



Maryland Poison Center  
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# Poison

# Prevention Press

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## Tips for detecting substance abuse in teens

Parents are often one step behind their teens when it comes to substance abuse issues. Hopefully these tips will provide valuable information to parents.

- Multiple cans of computer keyboard cleaner or other aerosol or solvent based products in a child's room may indicate inhalant use
- Use of incense, room deodorizers or perfume to hide smoke or chemical odors
- New use of mouthwash or breath mints attempt to cover up the smell of alcohol
- Missing prescription drugs—especially pain medicines and mood stabilizers
- Increased secrecy in conversations with friends and about possessions and activities

## Did you know that...

- In 2010, the Maryland Poison Center has received approximately a dozen calls regarding K2, Spice and other forms of synthetic marijuana?
- In 2010, poison centers across the country have received over 1,600 calls regarding K2 (this number is up from 14 in 2009!)?

## What You Need to Know: Synthetic Marijuana

Synthetic marijuana, also called K2, has been in the news recently. Ocean City banned the sale of K2 in 2009. Baltimore County banned its sale in 2010 and Baltimore City Council is currently reviewing a bill that would ban the sale of K2 in Baltimore City. What is this mysterious substance and why are legislators so interested in it?

K2, also known as “spice”, “genie”, “zohai” and “yucatan fire”, was originally made by researchers at Clemson University in the mid 1990’s. It mimics the effects of marijuana but is more potent. It was used at Clemson to study the biological effects of marijuana. It is thought that “street chemists” were able to make the chemical by reviewing information in scientific papers on the subject.

K2 is a liquid that is sprayed onto dried herbs, flowers or tobacco which is then smoked. K2 is sold in convenience stores, gas stations, smoke shops or over the internet. It is sometimes sold as incense or potpourri. It is sold in many different flavors or scents making it attractive to users of all ages. Except in areas where a law banning its sale has passed, anyone can buy the product. There are no age restrictions. The products are labeled “Not for human consumption”, however this warning does not deter users. Individuals are buying the product in an attempt to get the same feeling as they would from regular marijuana.

The difficulty is that often times, users report opposite effects from the synthetic product. They develop a fast, racing heartbeat, increased blood pressure, agitation and nausea/vomiting. Remember, this is an unregulated chemical being sprayed on dried herbs or flowers. There is no guarantee what the substance is or how much is actually being applied to the herbs.

The DEA (Federal Drug Enforcement Administration) is concerned because users think using K2 is a “safe high”. It is not considered a safe high because the exact contents are not known. The DEA is doing scientific evaluation on the products to determine if they need to be classified as a controlled substance. Some local law enforcement agencies are encouraging convenience stores and gas stations to stop selling the products. Some store owners are removing it from their shelves once they know what can happen when the product is smoked.

Synthetic marijuana is gaining in popularity among teens. Parents should be on the lookout for incense or potpourri in their child’s possession. The product is sold in a variety of packaging, some packages as small as a tea bag. Prices vary based on location. It is not illegal to have the product in their possession, but the health effects can be dangerous and unpredictable. Some teens have been taken to emergency rooms because they feel as if they are having a heart attack. Synthetic marijuana cannot be detected on a drug screen.



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