

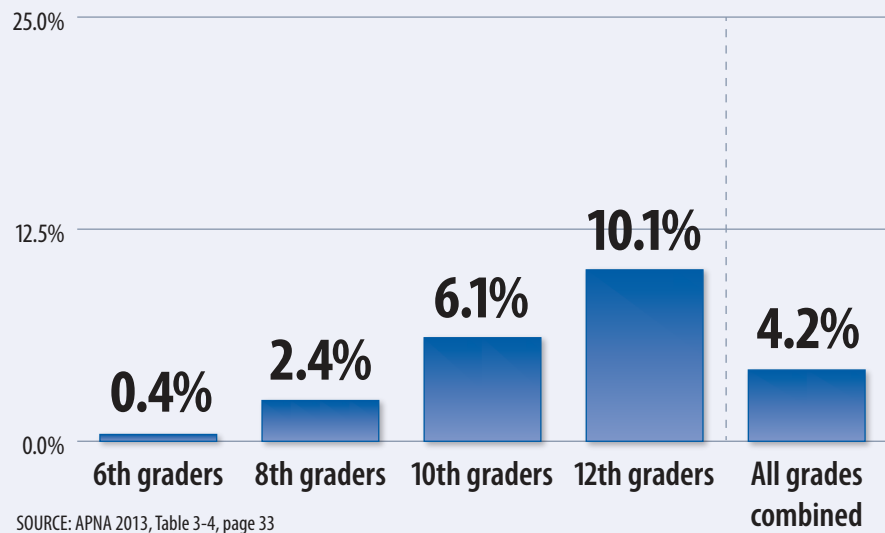
The Dangers of Synthetic Marijuana (“Herbal Incense”)

Synthetic marijuana blends, originally sold as “spice” or K2, began showing up in the mid-2000s and were marketed as a way to achieve a high by using a mixture of legal natural herbs.¹ At that time, synthetic marijuana was largely ignored by enforcement agencies. That changed in the late 2000s, when scientists found that these “natural herbs” were actually coated with synthetic cannabinoids.

In 2011 and again in 2013, Arkansas updated its Schedule VI Controlled Substances list (Arkansas Code Title 5, chapter 64, subchapter 2) to cover a wide range of chemicals. Because many other states and countries have banned synthetic cannabinoids, clandestine chemists started producing other psychoactive substances that fall outside of these bans.² These new chemicals are sprayed onto plant matter, then marketed as K2 alternatives and labeled as being free of synthetic cannabinoids. To the consumer, there is no way of knowing what psychoactive substance is in these packages. However, if it is being marketed as a legal substance, then it is highly likely to have a chemical on it that has never been tested in humans. It is also important to note that, because the contents of these packages are so inconsistent, there is a good chance for a user to overdose.

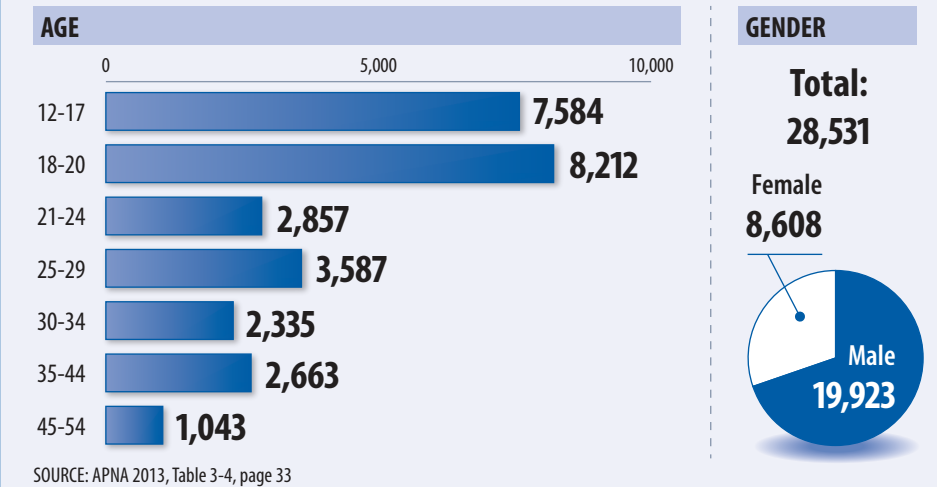


EXHIBIT 1.
Arkansas youth lifetime use of synthetic marijuana, 2013



A variety of synthetic marijuana brands.

EXHIBIT 2.
U.S. emergency department visits involving synthetic marijuana, by age and gender, 2011



Who is using synthetic marijuana?

Monitoring the Future, a national survey of American youth, indicated that synthetic marijuana products are common among teens. Annual use of synthetic marijuana was reported by 6.4 percent of students in 2013.³ Only a quarter of American youth perceived a risk in trying synthetic marijuana once or twice. The usage rates and low perceived risk are both cause for concern.

The Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment Student Survey has monitored the percentage of Arkansas teens reporting lifetime use of synthetic marijuana since 2012.⁴ The percentage of Arkansas teens increases at each additional grade level (**Exhibit 1**).

Emergency department (ED) visits involving synthetic marijuana were tracked for all age groups in the United States in 2011 (**Exhibit 2**).⁵ Although teens aren't the only ones using synthetic marijuana, use is highest in youth under the age of 21. Based on the same ED data, use of synthetic marijuana was also significantly higher in males.

In the United States, poison control centers reported 2,996 exposures to synthetic marijuana from Jan. 1, 2014, through Oct. 31, 2014.⁶ In this case, exposure means contact with the substance by mouth, breathing it in, or through the skin or eyes—it doesn't have to be an overdose to be reported as an exposure. The American Association of Poison Control Centers routinely reports exposure data, and while this is preliminary data, it does give an indication of the extent of the problem.

Herbal Incense Side Effects

Likely side effects include, but are not limited to:

- Dry mouth
- Extreme nausea
- Rapid heart rate
- Mild anxiety to full-blown panic attacks
- Sedation
- Post-intoxication exhaustion
- Impaired, changed perception, including time distortion
- Strong audio hallucinations
- Paranoia
- Strong dysphoria or a "really bad trip"
- Frequent users may experience addiction and withdrawal

More severe side effects include:

- Convulsions
- Dissociation of self or blackout
- Aggression and assault
- Self-mutilation
- Suicide
- Heart attacks
- Coma
- Death

What to watch for

While it is illegal to sell many of these products in Arkansas, anyone with access to the Internet can easily purchase these items marketed as herbal incense or potpourri. These are sold under a variety of brands, including Bizarro, Mad Hatter, G20 and Scooby Snax. They are sold in brightly colored packages and usually have the warning that they are "not for human consumption" in an effort to protect distributors of these items from liability.

SIGNS OF USE

There are a number of indicators parents should be aware of that could indicate their child or children are using synthetic marijuana. A strong smell of cloves on the breath or on clothing could be an indication of synthetic marijuana use. Parents should also talk to their children if they find smoking pipes or a coffee grinder, which is used to finely grind the substance into a powder. Also, parents should monitor their child's online purchases. Many of these substances are only available over the Internet, so parents be mindful of any irregular purchases and/or deliveries.

PHYSICAL SIGNS OF USE

People who use synthetic marijuana typically display increased irritability, profuse sweating, pale skin and/or vomiting. Also, look for a loss of physical control, as though the body is moving without the brain's prompting. Seizures, a lack of pain response, or uncontrolled and spastic body movements are examples of this symptom. ▲

LIST OF RESOURCES

- American Association of Poison Control Centers Synthetic Marijuana fact sheet:
www.aapcc.org/alerts/synthetic-marijuana/
- Connor Reid Eckhardt's Facebook page started by his family after his sudden death after using Spice:
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Connor-Reid-Eckhardt/270455916494386>
- I-Science: NIDA's look into what we still need to know about synthetic cannabinoids
www.drugabuse.gov/videos/i-science-nidas-look-what-we-still-need-to-know-about-synthetic-cannabinoids
- NIDA for Teens: Drug Facts-Spice
teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/spice
- Parents 360: Synthetic Drugs: Bath Salts, K2/Spice: A guide for parents and other influencers from
www.DrugFree.org
- Local poison control center phone number:
1-800-222-1222

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