

## Keeping Teens Safe This Summer

Parents need to learn the facts about new “synthetic” drugs so they can keep these dangerous, easy to get, and highly addictive products away from their children this summer.

By Karen Perry

For those of us who are raising teenagers, summer can be a daunting time.

It’s during these long, hot months that many of our children will be away from home with friends, having fun – and experimenting with drugs, some for the first time.

And, these days, the drugs tempting our children are more harmful, easier to get, and addictive than drugs available to youth in years past. In particular, an emerging category of “synthetic” drugs poses serious health threats to young people seeking the latest “new high.”



One of them is “synthetic marijuana,” a psychoactive herbal and chemical product that is smoked and mimics the effects of marijuana.

Sold under many names, including “K2” and “Spice,” in head shops, gas stations, and on the Internet, this manmade drug containing dangerous chemicals banned in many states is often marketed as “safe.” These synthetic chemicals are generally three to five times more potent than the THC found in marijuana.

The drug is known to cause paranoia, agitation, loss of consciousness, as well as psychotic episodes. Some teens have

coined the term “couch lock” to describe one of the drug’s effects – the inability to move despite being conscious.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that as many as one in nine high school seniors has tried synthetic marijuana. Calls to poison centers about the drug rose from 2,900 in 2010 to 7,000 in 2011.



Another emerging and similarly dangerous drug is “bath salts,” a designer street drug also known as “cocaine substitute” and “synthetic LSD.” It’s inhaled, swallowed or shot into a vein to produce euphoric effects.

Bath salts contain amphetamine-like chemicals such as methylenedioxypropylamphetamine (MDPV), mephedrone, and pyrovalerone. Like synthetic marijuana, “bath salts” increase heart rate and blood pressure. In severe cases, it can cause paranoia, hallucinations and aggressive behavior.

Many of the products in synthetic marijuana, “bath salts,” and related drugs are on schedule 1 of the Controlled Substances Act, which means that the drugs have no legitimate use or safety in the U.S., and are highly addictive.

Makers of these drugs have tried to stay ahead of law enforcement and regulators by altering their products chemically, replacing banned substances with new ones that have similar properties. With “bath salts,” the DEA has issued an emergency ban on three ingredients often found in the drug, and Congress is debating whether to impose a permanent ban.

So what are parents to do in keeping their children away from these drugs?

Reducing access to synthetic drugs and other dangerous drugs like heroin and prescription pills requires community-based efforts to monitor the activities of youth and educate them about the harm of experimenting with drugs.

Many of these prevention efforts start at home. So parents: get to know the facts about these new drugs and take appropriate action this summer to safeguard your children.

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