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LI REGIONAL POISON & DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

2010: #2

Potential Dangers of K2, “Spice” or “Fake Marijuana”

Twenty three poison centers, including Long Island, have recently received calls about products referred to as “fake marijuana” or “synthetic marijuana.” While making the mainstream news in the US since late 2009, these products have been of concern in Europe since early 2008. K2, Spice, Dream, Zohai and Genie, are herbal incense mixtures which contain various synthetic cannabinoids. Some of the more common cannabinoids are JWH-018, JWH-073, HU-210, HU-211 and CP 47,497. They are available on the Internet and from some places that sell incense. These synthetic cannabinoids stimulate the same receptors in the brain as tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main ingredient in natural marijuana. The cannabinoids’ potency range from three times to hundreds of times the potency of THC. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has labeled these cannabinoids as “drugs and chemicals of concern,” but only HU-210 is a Schedule 1 controlled substance. Currently, none of these cannabinoids are detected by routine marijuana drug screens.

Reports on the internet from people who have smoked these products say that the effects range from having no effect to producing the same type of high as they have experienced from smoking regular marijuana.

The experiences reported to poison centers, either by the users themselves or by health care professionals, are different from the depressant effects expected from smoking marijuana. Nearly all of the patients had anxiety and anxiousness. Other symptoms included dizziness, panic attacks, severe agitation, hallucinations, seizures, pale skin, vomiting and elevated heart rate. Some patients have also had tremors and chest pain. No deaths have been reported. At this time, it’s unclear why users are experiencing these effects but it’s thought that these effects are either dose related or the result of other drugs or chemicals in the products. The treatment for these patients is symptomatic and supportive. The Long Island Regional Poison and Drug Information Center is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to answer questions about K2, synthetic cannabinoids or any other substance that could be harmful.

1) Noble, T. *Iowa Poison Hotline* April 2010;

2) Lanham J *St Louis Globe-Democrat* 2010, Feb 11



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