

## **K2/Spice: Advice to Users**

### **What is it?**

Drugs of the kind usually called K2 or Spice came out of research trying to understand how marijuana works in the body. Some of these drugs turned out to be much stronger than marijuana, and sometimes so different that they seemed like a completely new kind of drug. When people started using them to get high, laws were passed making them illegal. Since then chemists keep making new versions of K2 as the old ones become illegal. Most of the drugs sold now have been changed many times since they were invented. Animal tests on the original drugs showed big differences among them as to how fast their effects came on and how long they lasted.

K2 packages, now sold under hundreds of different names, contain these new chemicals sprayed on plant leaves. The spraying onto the leaves is uneven and some parts of a bag can be much stronger than others. The exact drug being sprayed changes frequently, and more than one drug is sometimes sprayed. So each tokes can be of different strength and each bag, even of the same brand, may have been sprayed with different drugs.

### **Is K2 safe?**

Drugs currently sold as K2 or Spice have never been tested for safety on either humans or animals. Deaths because of K2 poisoning are rare, but have been reported. More common are deaths related to unsafe behaviors after taking them. Since K2 is so hard to detect in urine tests, there are probably more deaths related to its use than are recorded. Trips to emergency rooms are common: in July and August of 2015 in New York City, there were more than 2,300 ER visits for K2, about 37 a day.

### **What is the high like?**

K2 effects are much stronger and much more unpredictable than marijuana. K2 can have downer or upper effects (sedating or agitating), even among a group all smoking from the same bag. In some cases, the effects resemble very strong marijuana or can be “trippy”, a little like LSD. But unexpected and unwelcome effects include bizarre and sometimes violent behaviors that the person may have no memory of later. Panic attacks, paranoia, and nausea /vomiting can also occur.

### **When to call 9-1-1**

Consider calling 9-1-1 when someone is having a bad or extreme reaction to K2 and cannot be calmed or managed. Definitely call 9-1-1 if you think someone is likely to harm themselves or someone else. If someone is unconscious, turn them on their side so they don't choke if they vomit – and call 9-1-1.

### **What to do if someone is having a bad K2 experience**

If they are afraid or panicking, try to bring them to a quiet place and help them feel peaceful and safe. Have as few people around as possible. The user should feel that they can leave if they want to. Speak clearly and calmly and acknowledge what they say without agreeing or disagreeing. Tell them that what they are feeling comes from the drug and that the bad part will wear off, usually in about an hour. They should drink fluids, especially if they have been vomiting

### **Will drug testing show if I've been using K2?**

Very unlikely. The new kinds of K2 on the street are changing faster than the new urine tests can keep up with.

### **Is K2 legal?**

No.

**NY State:** Possession of more than 10 bags is considered intent to sell, whether the bags are full or just have a little bit in them. Possession in New York State of less than 10 bags is a violation (a civil, not a criminal offence) punishable by a fine up to \$250 and/or up to 15 days in prison for each bag. Police are generally not arresting users, but remember, they can do that at any time they choose.

**New York City:** The penalty for possession of more than 10 bags in New York City is a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or prison for up to one year.

**State Laws:** Details for particular states can be found at <http://www.namsdl.org/synthetic-substances.cfm>

### **Is it addictive?**

Some people can just cut down or stop when they want to. But others who try are surprised to find that they have become dependent on K2. They may become jittery and irritable, lose their appetite or find they can't sleep well. They may also get headaches, stomach pains, fevers, chills, and trembling hands.

### **How can I cut down or stop using?**

Here are some situations that might make you think about cutting down on K2:

- It's getting in the way of other things you are trying to do.
- You are using every day.
- Friends and loved ones are saying you're using too often.
- You are feeling withdrawal when you don't smoke: jittery and irritable, headaches, no appetite, can't sleep well, stomach pains, fevers, chills, and trembling hands.

If you think you need help with using less or stopping, try to go to a place you have heard good things about. It may be hard to find one that will just treat K2. Most detox and treatment places don't have any special skill with K2 but will treat it along with other substances you are using.

### **Advice for safer using**

Go slow! Take a toke and wait to feel some effects. Some kinds of K2 come on so fast that a toke is hardly finished as the effects hit. But other kinds can take a few minutes to be felt.

Don't take K2 at the same time that you are doing other street drugs. It's always safer to use one drug at a time, but this is especially true with K2 since you never know what is in the bag you are smoking from. Also, the amount of K2 in the smoke varies from toke to toke because of the way it is sprayed unevenly onto the leaves.

If vomiting, drink extra fluids to make up for what is lost in vomiting.

If someone seems to be unconscious while using K2, turn them on their side to protect them from choking if they vomit and call 9-1-1. Keep an eye on them and be sure their breathing sounds normal. If

breathing slows down and you can't wake them up, it might be an opioid overdose on top of the K2: USE NALOXONE. It probably won't do anything for the K2, but will block the opioids.

Always continue to take your prescribed psych medications. They are intended to keep you steady in mind and body and may help handle stressful highs. There is no evidence that psych medicines mix badly with K2.

When using, try to make a safe place for yourself and be with people you trust.

Some users try to stick to one brand. There are so many different kinds of K2, each with its own side effects and timing, that it's good to limit your exposure to as few kinds as possible – even though the chemicals in the same brand will change after a while, too.