

The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System — Serving New Jersey Since 1983

## ***MEDIA ALERT***

Media Contacts:

800-222-1222 (800-962-1253 outside NJ)

### **Designer Drugs – Not a Safe High** – Manmade, Unpredictable and Addictive –

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*Available for Interviews*

**(Newark, NJ) – August 1, 2017** We've all heard the horror stories ... a young man running through his neighborhood naked while displaying bizarre and uncontrollable behavior; a group of people walking a neighborhood street in a zombielike state (confused and delirious); dozens hospitalized after staggering on the street, foaming at the mouth; a woman in coma after violent hallucinations and a seizure.

What do all these stories have in common? They all involve the use of synthetic drugs, or "designer drugs". These drugs are chemically made in underground labs promoted as a safe and legal high and cause severe and even fatal health effects to users. Backdoor chemists design synthetics to mimic the effects of other illicit drugs for the sole purpose of abuse. They contain highly addictive mind-altering chemicals. Because the contents are not regulated, the effects are unpredictable and the potency is often much greater than the actual drugs they are designed to imitate.

Synthetic cannabinoids (SCs) were created to mimic the effects of marijuana. In reality, the effects are quite different than those of herbal marijuana. Often referred to as fake pot/weed, it's a mixture of dry plant material sprayed with a variety of manmade chemicals. It does not produce a natural high nor is it safe to use. Users say the smokable form of the drug looks like potpourri. The liquid form may be used in e-cigarettes, vaporizers, etc. There are hundreds of street names for SCs, but the most common are K2 and Spice.

Synthetic cathinones (sometimes called Bath Salts) are stimulants created to "mimic those of methamphetamine, cocaine, and ecstasy, or a combination thereof."<sup>1</sup> They are known to cause hallucinations similar to LSD, but pack a powerful punch of overstimulation, causing the user to hallucinate with uncontrollable aggression. Most commonly sold as a powder and consumed by snorting, swallowing, smoking, vaping or injecting. Make no mistake - none of these products has anything at all to do with spas, baths or tubs. In fact, Bath Salts have quite the

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<sup>1</sup> "[Synthetic Drugs Fact Sheet](#)." American College of Emergency Physicians. Web. 26 July 2017.

opposite effect of relaxation; “body temperatures, heart rates, and blood pressures soar to critical and immediately dangerous levels.”<sup>1</sup> As with synthetic marijuana, there are hundreds of street names for Bath Salts, but some common names include Vanilla Sky and Cloud Nine.

Why have these drugs become so popular with teens/young adults in recent years? Dealers falsely promote these products as a safe alternative to illegal street drugs. Synthetics are widely available, found on the Internet and in retail stores, and highly addictive. A recent study in the *Journal of Medical Toxicology* concluded that the majority of patients were young adult males who used SCs simply to get high.<sup>2</sup>

“These products follow no rules. There’s no way to know what you are getting in that package each time you use,” says Dr. Diane Calello, Medical Director of the NJ Poison Center, Rutgers NJ Medical School and author of the study.

Knowing the long-term effects of these drugs will be difficult given that the chemicals and the potency constantly change. What we do know is that the use of these drugs can be life-threatening and can include

- seizures
- high blood pressure
- kidney/liver damage
- severe agitation
- intense hallucinations and delusions
- psychosis
- confusion
- anxiety

If you believe someone has used a synthetic drug or has overdosed, call poison control right away at 1-800-222-1222 unless the person is unconscious, not breathing, seizing/convulsing, difficult to arouse/wake up, etc. then call 9-1-1.

### **Help is Just a Phone Call Away!**

We are social. Join us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/njpies) (www.facebook.com/njpies) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/NJPoisonCenter) (@NJPoisonCenter) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc.

### **Real People. Real Answers.**

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<sup>2</sup> “Characteristics and Treatment of Patients with Clinical Illness Due to Synthetic Cannabinoid Inhalation Reported by Medical Toxicologists: A ToxIC Database Study.” *Journal of Medical Toxicology*. (April 10, 2017). DOI 10.1007/s13181-017-0605-9

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### **About NJPIES**

As New Jersey's only poison control center, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hot line services and the Web. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NJPIES coordinates state poison education and research and is designated as the regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A division of the Department of Emergency Medicine of the New Jersey Medical School of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located on the school's Newark campus. NJPIES is funded, in part, by the NJ Department of Health and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies, and those with any drug information questions, should call the toll-free hot line, **800-222-1222**, any time. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit [www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org) or call **973-972-9280**.

### **About Rutgers**

Established in 1766, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is America's eighth oldest institution of higher learning and one of the nation's premier public research universities. Serving more than 65,000 students on campuses, centers, institutes and other locations throughout the state, Rutgers is the only public university in New Jersey that is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities.

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) is the health care education, research, and clinical division of Rutgers University, comprising nine schools and their attendant faculty practices, centers, institutes and clinics; New Jersey's leading comprehensive cancer care center; and New Jersey's largest behavioral health care network.

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