

Our goal is to provide information to representatives regarding matters related to substance abuse, prevention, and treatment. Our coalition includes PMP (Prevention Means Progress), TFS (Tobacco Free Sarpy), TFCC (Tobacco Free Cass County), LiveWise, NFC (Nebraska Families Collaborative), NUIHC (Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition), CSI (Child Saving Institute), MOTAC (Metro Omaha Tobacco Action Coalition), Boys Town, The Purple Project, receives technical assistance from Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare, and is always adding to our membership.

SYNTHETIC DRUGS: What LEARN wants you to know this quarter

In just a **10 day period**, over **100 users** of K2 and other synthetic drugs, many of them youth and young adults, flowed into Lincoln hospitals' emergency rooms earlier this month. This stream of events brought synthetic drugs to the attention of the public, while synthetic drugs have been a concern to LEARN members for years.

What are Synthetic Drugs like K2 or Bath Salts?

- Synthetic **cannabinoids** are man-made chemicals that are applied (often sprayed) onto plant material and marketed as a "legal" high. These drugs are now the second most frequently used illegal drug among high school students after marijuana. The harmful effects from these products were first reported in the U.S. in 2009. Since then, the drugs have spread throughout the country.
- Synthetic marijuana is very different from marijuana. It contains powerful chemicals called **cannabimimetics** and can cause dangerous health effects. The drugs are made specifically to be **abused**. Like many other illegal drugs, synthetic marijuana is not tested for safety, and users don't know what chemicals they are putting into their bodies. Poison center experts – as well as many federal, state, and local government officials – have called synthetic drug use a risk to the public's health and a hazard to public safety.
- Despite most compounds being made illegal, many synthetic drugs are available over the internet. Others are sold in shops across the U.S. Some stores even pass out samples. One of the "loop holes" that manufacturers use is labeling these drugs as "Not for Human Consumption." This ensures that if a user tries to blame (i.e. sue) them for the horrible side effects, that they can insist that it was not meant to be smoked. The smokable forms are marketed as "herbal incense" or "flavored tobacco." However, manufacturers have realized that something that stinks cannot be disguised as incense, so they

have most recently been sprayed with fragrances to actually give off a pleasant aroma.

- Synthetic **cathinone** products often consist of methylenedioxypropylvalerone (MDPV), mephedrone, and methylene. Often marketed as "bath salts," these substances have names like Ivory Wave, Vanilla Sky, Cloud 9 and Bliss. They are NOT the bath salts you use in your tub. These are powerful illegal drugs that have not been tested for safety, and users don't really know exactly what chemicals they are putting into their bodies. The side effects they cause may be permanent.

Side effects:

Poison center experts say these substances are among the worst they have seen. Users have experienced many side effects, such as:

- Paranoia and violent behavior
- Hallucinations
- Suicidal thoughts
- Seizures
- Anxiety and Panic attacks
- Increased blood pressure and heart rate
- Chest pain
- Nausea and vomiting

Harm in Numbers:

According to Christine Gabig, Douglas County forensic scientist, 32,000 Nebraskans visited the ER due to synthetic drug use in 2013. In 2014,

that number more than doubled to 70,000. Of course, these numbers do not represent the number of people that use—only those that use and have to go to the ER. In Douglas County hospitals so far this year, the number of ER visits has already doubled all of the ER visits that there were in 2014. Thanks to the Purple Project and other prevention groups' efforts, no one in Nebraska died from synthetic drugs in 2014 in Nebraska, but the use is clearly still on the rise.

There is an increasingly expanding array of synthetic drugs available: 51 new synthetic cannabinoids were identified in 2012, compared to just two in 2009. Furthermore, 31 new synthetic cathinones were identified in 2012, compared to only four in 2009. In addition, 76 other synthetic compounds were identified in 2012, bringing the total number of new synthetic substances identified in 2012 to 158. As policy makers outlaw the compounds of these substances, the manufacturers change the composition ever so slightly. K2 was made illegal by policy makers, so the manufacturer basically created a K3. K3 was made illegal so they created a K4. We are in the ninth generation of K2. They don't change the name and call it K3, K4, etc. but that is essentially what they have done.

Drug testing companies have a hard time keeping their tests updated with the latest compounds. Standard panels may not even initially screen for synthetics. This makes it a common drug of choice for people in trouble with the law.

