



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

[www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org)

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## **Designer drug 'Spice' is an emerging public health concern; public hearing scheduled for Sept. 19**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

#### **CONTACT:**

Jim McVay, Dr.P.A.  
(334) 206-5600

Many Alabamians are suffering adverse medical consequences after smoking "Spice," a psychoactive herbal and chemical compound that mimics marijuana, statistics confirm.

This compound is a blend of herbs coated with a synthetic chemical which is very similar to the natural substance in marijuana which gives users their "high." The chemicals reportedly stimulate the same brain areas affected by marijuana. It has hundreds of different variants and is also commonly marketed as "K2," "Spice Gold," "Sence," "Genie," "Zohai," "Yucatan Fire," "Smoke" and "Skunk."

The Regional Poison Control Center at Children's of Alabama reports receiving 67 calls from persons exposed to "K2" or "Spice" since October 2010. Three victims were children 6 to 12 years of age, 15 were teenagers and 22 were in their 20s. The majority (76 percent) were male. Of these callers at least 56 were treated for toxic exposure to synthetic marijuana in hospital emergency rooms; the remaining callers refused referral.

According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, more than 6,700 calls were made to poison control centers nationally in 2010 and in the first seven months of 2011 about synthetic marijuana.

Complaints have included hallucinations, nausea and vomiting, paranoia, and increased heart rate. "Spice" can be obtained online, at convenience stores/gas stations, head shops and tobacco shops. The Drug Enforcement Agency considers synthetic marijuana a drug of concern because of a surge in emergency room visits and calls to poison control centers. Several states, countries and branches of the Armed Forces have banned its use. The long-term health effects of its use are unknown.

"This is an emerging and dangerous designer drug which has the potential of destroying lives," Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said. "We want to explore the best solutions to prevent its misuse."

The Alabama Department of Public Health will hold a public hearing to receive public comment and input about the extent of this problem and possible solutions. The hearing will be held on

Monday, Sept. 19 at 9:30 a.m. at the State Capitol Auditorium, North Union Street Entrance,  
Montgomery, Ala.

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