



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Hospital reports of synthetic cannabinoid use may have been trending down over past week

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alabama hospitals have reported seeing substantially fewer patients presenting with symptoms consistent with exposure to synthetic cannabinoids, commonly known as spice, during the week of May 5-11. These illegal substances are being ingested or smoked and are being used alone or in combination with other drugs. While it appears numbers may be trending down, several hospitals previously reporting did not report this past week.

A total of 964 patients have been reported by Alabama hospitals between March 17 and May 11, and there have been at least 217 patients hospitalized and five deaths. Last week there were 26 patients reported by Alabama hospitals with 11 hospitalizations, far fewer than the hundreds seen in the previous four weeks.

“While we are pleased that more people appear to be aware of how hazardous and unpredictable these substances are to themselves and others, we want to continue to emphasize that using spice is an extremely dangerous practice,” Assistant State Health Officer Dr. Mary McIntyre said. Long-term health effects are unknown.

“We have been informed about how violent people under the influence of synthetic cannabinoids can be not only posing a danger to themselves but also to those around them,” Assistant State Health Officer Dr. Mary McIntyre said. “Their behavior may be bizarre and violent, so if you encounter someone you suspect is under the influence of spice, call 9-1-1 at once.”

Symptoms spice users exhibit include the following:

- Severe agitation, hyperactivity and anxiety
- Racing heartbeat and elevated blood pressure
- Muscle spasms, seizures and tremors
- Intense hallucinations and psychotic episodes
- Coma

Users of synthetic marijuana can experience these symptoms or others, with varying intensity. Because there is no control of the types or amount of chemicals contained, users have no way of knowing what they are ingesting. Analyses done in other states have shown not only the presence of synthetic cannabinoids but other chemicals including amphetamines and methamphetamine, cocaine, and Lovamisole (an animal dewormer), creating a toxic combination.

The designer drug substances consist of dried plant material sprayed with synthetic cannabinoids and various mixtures of other unknown chemicals including pesticides and rat poison. The chemical compounds reportedly stimulate the same brain areas affected by marijuana, and they have a high potential for abuse. Users may opt for these marijuana alternatives because they mistakenly believe the substances are safe.