



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104
Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5520

www.adph.org

Hospital visits for synthetic cannabinoid use in Alabama continue to decrease; ADPH again cautions public not to use these unsafe, illegal substances

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Jim McVay

(334) 206-5600

(334) 201-8660

Despite increased awareness of the dangers of synthetic cannabinoids known as spice, these substances are still being ingested or smoked in Alabama. These dangerous substances are being used alone or in combination with other drugs.

A total of 1,019 patients suspected of using spice have been seen in Alabama hospitals between March 17 and May 18, and there have been at least 246 patients hospitalized and five deaths in the past three months. While the total numbers seen at Alabama hospitals during the week of May 12-18 is an increase of 55 from the numbers announced last week, the totals from several hospitals not reporting last week are included in the most current count.

“We are hopeful that this downward trend will continue,” Assistant State Health Officer Dr. Mary McIntyre said. “With the approaching holiday, please remember that these products are both illegal and unsafe. Do not use them.”

In two weeks during April, April 7-13 and April 21-27, more than 300 probable spice users had been seen at Alabama hospitals. Dr. McIntyre cautioned that people under the influence of synthetic cannabinoids may exhibit bizarre and violent behavior that can endanger not only themselves but others around them.

Symptoms of spice use 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 conducted 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.

-30-

5/26/15