

# Synthetic Drugs: What You Need to Know

Synthetic drugs are the cause of growing numbers of injuries and deaths, particularly in young people, in Illinois and across the country.

## What Are Synthetic Drugs?

Synthetic drugs are chemically laced substances akin to marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamine that are sold over the counter at convenience stores, gas stations and tobacco shops throughout Illinois.

Based on their chemical make-up, these drugs are commonly divided into two categories:

- **Cannabinoids**  
Popularly known as K2 or Spice, cannabinoids are chemically formulated versions of synthetic marijuana that consist of lab-manufactured THC.
- **Cathinones**  
Often known as “bath salts,” cathinones contain chemical compounds that mimic the effects of cocaine or meth.

Though the drugs’ packaging states the products are not intended for human consumption, their design, labeling and marketing clearly allude to the products being smoked and inhaled as a drug.

## Why Are They So Dangerous?

One reason that synthetic drugs are extremely dangerous is that buyers don’t know what chemicals they are ingesting. Individual products can contain a vast range of different chemical formulations and potencies, some of which can be two to 500 times stronger than THC.

## How Common Is Synthetic Drug Abuse?

According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, calls nationwide indicate a dramatic rise in synthetic drug abuse. Calls from around the country to poison control centers regarding severe reactions to synthetic marijuana numbered 2,915 in 2010, but have risen to more than 6,300 so far in 2011. Synthetic bath salt use is also on the rise. In 2010 poison control centers received 303 calls about injuries and deaths caused by bath salts; thus far in 2011, there have been over 5,800 reports.

## Why Aren’t These Drugs Illegal?

Though states, including Illinois, have implemented bans on specific formulas of synthetic marijuana and bath salts, drug makers can easily sidestep these regulations. Manufacturers adapt simply by replacing the chemical compound of a banned synthetic cannabinoid or cathinone with a newer formulation that is not yet known to authorities. This modification process poses increasing risk to its young users, who are unaware of the reactions the new chemicals may cause.

*For more information about synthetic drugs, please visit [www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov](http://www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov).*

