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Teens trying dangerous new *legal* drug

By Rachel Galvin

Have you heard of K2? Chances are your kids have. This drug that mimics marijuana is legal in Florida. Kids can walk into a local smoke shop and buy it no questions asked or buy it on-line. The problem is that this "fake weed" is causing dangerous side effects. It is because of this that other states are seeking to ban the drug. As of now, it is still legal here.

This marijuana copycat is

much more potent than its counterpart and those who have used it are having terrible reactions: hallucinations, severe agitation, elevated heart rates, vomiting and seizures.

Dr. Steven R. Scanlan M.D. of Palm Beach Outpatient Detox, of Boca Raton, has witnessed this strong drug firsthand.

"When someone smokes just one hit of this, it is so potent, it can cause problems with anxiety, paranoia etc. I

had one patient that became so anxious she relapsed to alcohol in order to calm down," he said.

Dr. Scanlan thinks this drug will be illegal soon, noting drugs like MDMA, GHB and Ecstasy that were legal at first are now illegal. "You could buy them in nutrition shops [at first]," he said.

In the meantime, he notes that kids are greatly affected by this drug. "I saw kids walking like zombies near a smoke

shop." He checked with the woman who worked inside and found that these kids were using K2.

Looking at a package of K2, it looks harmless enough, with its ingredients just listing herbs. But the mild-altering compounds JWH-018 and JWH-073 are not shown. These compounds were developed in 1990 by an organic chemist named John Huffman while

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studying affects of marijuana on the brain. Another individual later found a way to market these compounds into K2.

When rolled up and smoked, this incense-like mixture looks just like marijuana. Also called "Zohai," "Spice" or "Genie," this drug is a mixture of spices and herbs sprayed with these synthetic compounds, which are chemically similar to THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. The fact that this drug is syn-

thetic, not natural, also concerns Dr. Scanlan.

Although the drug affects different people differently, many teens have reported "feeling like they are going to die," losing circulation to their extremities, seizures, bad headaches, uncontrollable fear or crying. Some have considered it closer to a bad LSD trip than the feelings brought on by marijuana. Others have had impaired vision, body numbness, nausea and short-term memory loss. The drug's potency can lead to damage of the lungs,

brain, heart and other vital organs.

This is just one of many drugs that are prevalent among the teen population right now that parents should be aware of and Dr. Scanlan views K2 as a perfect lead-in to use of other drugs. Scanlan said, "If marijuana is considered a 'gateway' drug, then K2 is the 'highway' drug," indicating the increased potency. Look for additional articles about this topic and other dangerous drugs to watch out for in future *Observers*.



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