

SYNTHETIC DRUG THREATS



Updated November 28, 2012

State legislatures are outlawing two classes of synthetic drugs: synthetic cannabinoids (a.k.a. “Spice” or “K2”) and substituted cathinones (a.k.a. “bath salts”). At least 45 states and Puerto Rico have already banned one or both of these substances. Legislation in 2009 and 2010 targeted specific versions of the drugs. However, minor changes to the chemical make-up of these substances can create new but very similar drugs not covered in the law. In response, 2011 and 2012 legislation targets entire classes of

substances and aims to prevent new formulations of synthetic drugs from remaining unregulated, while still allowing the substances for approved medical and research purposes.

Synthetic Cannabinoids (a.k.a. "Spice" or "K2")

At least 41 states and Puerto Rico have legislatively banned synthetic cannabinoids. More information on state synthetic cannabinoid laws are available on our [Synthetic Cannabinoid Enactments](#) and [Pending Synthetic Cannabinoid Legislation](#) pages.

Synthetic cannabinoids are chemically engineered substances similar to tetrahydrocannabinol (“THC”), the active ingredient in marijuana. When smoked or ingested, synthetic cannabinoids can produce a high similar to marijuana. Initially developed for pain management research and the effects of cannabis on the brain, these substances have recently become a popular alternative to marijuana. The substances are sprayed on dried herbs and marketed and sold in local convenience stores or on the Internet under names like “Spice,” “K2” or “Genie.”

Synthetic cannabinoids can be classified into eight general groups, based on the type of chemical alteration made to the original substance: tetrahydrocannabinols; naphthoylindoles; naphthylmethylindoles; naphthoylpyrroles; naphthylideneindenes or naphthylmethylindenes; Phenylacetylindoles; cyclohexylphenols; and benzoylindoles. For more information on synthetic cannabinoid classes and the substances included in each, see [Synthetic Cannabinoid Classes](#).

Substituted Cathinones (a.k.a. "Bath Salts")

At least 43 states and Puerto Rico have outlawed substituted cathinones. More information on state substituted cathinone laws are available on our [Substituted Cathinone Enactments](#) and [Pending Substituted Cathinone Legislation](#) pages.

Substituted cathinones, commonly known by their street name, “bath salts,” are derivatives of cathinone, a psychoactive substance with stimulant properties occurring naturally in the *khat* plant. The effects of substituted cathinones are similar to amphetamines like ecstasy and cocaine.

The four most widely recognized substituted cathinones are mephedrone, MDVP, methylone and methedrone. While these substances are typically referred to individually, they can be classified more generally as compounds structurally derived from cathinones and modified in one of a few different

ways. For more information on substituted cathinone classification and related substances, see [Substituted Cathinone Classes](#).

Federal Action

On July 9, 2012, the federal Synthetic Drug Abuse Prevention Act of 2012 was signed into law. The law adds certain classes of synthetic cannabinoids and two substituted cathinones—mephedrone and MDPV—to the federal controlled substances act.

States with Legislation Outlawing Synthetic Drugs:

STATE	SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS	SUBSTITUTED CATHINONES	STATE	SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS	SUBSTITUTED CATHINONES
Alabama	X	X	Montana	X	
Alaska	X	X	Nebraska	X	
Arizona	X	X	Nevada		X
Arkansas	X	X	New Hampshire		
California	X		New Jersey		X
Colorado	X	X	New Mexico	X	X
Connecticut	X	X	New York		X
Delaware	X	X	North Carolina	X	X
Florida	X	X	North Dakota	X	X
Georgia	X	X	Ohio	X	X
Hawaii	X	X	Oklahoma	X	X
Idaho	X	X	Oregon		
Illinois	X	X	Pennsylvania	X	X
Indiana	X	X	Rhode Island	X	X

STATE	SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS	SUBSTITUTED CATHINONES	STATE	SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS	SUBSTITUTED CATHINONES
Iowa	X	X	South Carolina	X	X
Kansas	X	X	South Dakota	X	X
Kentucky	X	X	Tennessee	X	X
Louisiana	X	X	Texas	X	X
Maine	X	X	Utah	X	X
Maryland		X	Vermont		
Massachusetts		X	Virginia	X	X
Michigan	X	X	Washington		
Minnesota	X	X	West Virginia	X	X
Mississippi	X	X	Wisconsin	X	X
Missouri	X	X	Wyoming	X	X
			Puerto Rico	X	X
TOTAL BANS PER SUBSTANCE				42	44
TOTAL BANS ON BOTH				40	

Source: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/civil-and-criminal-justice/synthetic-drug-threats.aspx>