

SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS

WHAT ARE THEY?

Synthetic cannabinoids (sin-the-tic can-a-bin-oids) are man-made drugs which target cannabinoid receptors in the brain. They are powdered chemicals which are dissolved and sprayed onto paper or dried plant material, hence the name "spice". The strength of the drug will vary and you get "hot spots", where the chemical is stronger at some parts than others.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS?

New cannabinoids are stronger than previous ones. The effects are more dangerous and unpredictable than cannabis. Effects include a short lived intense high, difficulty moving, feelings of heaviness, nausea and heart palpitations. Their use can also cause seizures and organ damage.

They are addictive and people report cravings to take more. Even in small doses, people who have no history of mental health issues report severe side effects including anxiety, paranoia, suicidal thoughts and depression.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

The Psychoactive Substances Act (2016) bans substances that produce a psychoactive effect (i.e. "legal highs"). Supply and possession is an offence in prison and penalties range from civil sanctions to a 7 year sentence. Many cannabinoids are Class B drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971).

The police are now taking an active role in prosecuting those who possess or take psychoactive substances in prison. They will seek the strongest penalties against those who are caught bringing or sending any drug into prison. If you or someone you know is under pressure to bring or send drugs to prison – don't do it.

HARM REDUCTION

The best way to avoid drug harm is to not take them but if you or someone you know does take drugs the following information may help.

- 1** It is impossible to know what the drug is. The strength will vary between batches and certain parts of the packet or paper may be stronger than others. Start with a small test dose - this might be quarter of a pill, a few draws of a joint.
- 2** Avoid sharing equipment as this can transmit infections.
- 3** Pace yourself and wait a few hours before taking any more.
- 4** Keep hydrated, drink small sips of water (about half a pint per hour).
- 5** If jaw clenching or teeth grinding, chew soft sweets.
- 6** If the effects are too extreme try to stay relaxed and drink small sips of water or flat sugary juice.
- 7** If the person taking drugs is unconscious (not awake and not responding to sound or touch) call 999 for medical help straight away
- 8** If the person taking drugs is sleeping, place them in the recovery position (on their side) and check them frequently to ensure they are okay.
- 9** In an emergency get help and be honest about what has been taken.
- 10** Have at least a few drug free days a week to allow your body to recover.
- 11** If experiencing withdrawal symptoms try to avoid taking more drugs, get rest, eat and drink water. The severity of symptoms will reduce

THE RECOVERY POSITION

