

Teen dares using holiday spices can easily turn fatal

December 13 2013

Cinnamon, nutmeg and marshmallows are usually just seen by adults as ingredients for holiday treats. But in the eyes of many teens who accept a common dare, these spices can be the recipe for death.

"The envelope is always being pushed to create something new that will get attention, potentially create a druglike effect and can pass under the radar of law enforcers," said Christina Hantsch, MD, toxicologist, Department of Emergency Medicine at Loyola University Health System.

The Cinnamon Challenge

Last year the number of calls to U.S. poison centers about cinnamon abuse by teens 13-19 totaled 222, according to the National Poison Data System. This year, from Jan. 1 to Nov. 30, there were 50 cases.

In the Cinnamon Challenge kids try to swallow 1 tablespoon of ground cinnamon without water. The loose, dry cinnamon triggers a violent coughing attack. The cinnamon produces a burning sensation in the throat and lungs that prompts breathing problems. Hundreds of Internet videos and postings have made it a social media sensation.

Loyola's Emergency Medicine specialists have seen firsthand the results of these dares.

"A group of 9-year-olds was trying to do the Cinnamon Challenge and got caught," said Hantsch, who is a former medical director of Illinois Poison Control. "One girl had seen the videos on the Internet and wanted to try it with her friends."

Hantsch is concerned that younger children are copying older teens.

"They have easy access to ingredients like [cinnamon](#) and marshmallows and think it is cool to do what their older peers are doing," Hantsch said.

The Chubby Bunny Marshmallow Dare

Chubby Bunny is another popular game that has an evergreen presence on YouTube and in the ER. "You stuff as many marshmallows in your mouth as possible and then try to say the words 'Chubby Bunny'," Hantsch said. "Two children have actually choked to death attempting this game, so it is not to be taken lightly."

Nutmeg Produces a High

Ground nutmeg has been snorted, smoked and eaten in large quantities to produce a marijuanalike high, Loyola experts said.

"Nutmeg contains myristicin, which is a hallucinogenic like LSD," the toxicologist said. Other common household products that are being abused are hand sanitizer, aerosol whipped cream, aerosol cooking spray, ink markers and glue.

Synthetic Marijuana

"There actually is a [synthetic marijuana](#) called Spice, or K2, that is very popular right now because it cannot be detected in standard drug tests,"

Hantsch said. "Spice is popular right now because it is marketed as a legal high - which it is not - but it is dangerous because its effects are more adverse than cannabis."

According to the 2012 Monitoring the Future survey of youth drug-use trends, 1 in 9 U.S. 12th graders reported using synthetic cannabinoids in the past year. This rate, unchanged from 2011, puts synthetic cannabinoids as the second most frequently used illegal drug among high school seniors after marijuana. Respiratory, cardiac and nerve damage have all been documented in relation to substance abuse by users.

"Seemingly silly games can have sinister effects and the holidays are the worst time for this to happen," Hantsch said. "Kids have more free time, greater access to the Internet and more opportunities to get together during vacations. And at Christmas, the kitchen pantry is loaded for holiday baking. Adults are wise to keep an eye on their children to make sure they are using the [ingredients](#) for their proper use."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

Citation: Teen dares using holiday spices can easily turn fatal (2013, December 13) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-teen-holiday-spices-easily-fatal.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.