

Fake weed seen as a public health danger

August 17 2018, by Mike Stobbe



In this Thursday, Aug. 16, 2018 file photo, paramedics and EMT members respond to one of three simultaneous drug overdose victims on the New Haven Green, a city park in New Haven, Conn. Police swarmed a Connecticut park near Yale University and searched people's homes for drugs Thursday in an effort to prevent more overdoses from a batch of synthetic marijuana blamed for sending more than 70 people to the hospital. (Brian A. Pounds/Hearst Connecticut Media via AP)

A decade after first appearing in the United States, fake weed is seen as a growing health danger.

Some marijuana smokers turned to it because it is relatively cheap and not detected in routine drug testing. Dozens of people in New Haven, Connecticut, went to the hospital this week after overdosing on a batch of [synthetic marijuana](#).

A look at the issue:

WHAT IS IT?

While states have moved to legalize traditional marijuana, fake pot has become a public health threat. Synthetic marijuana is a mind-altering drug made by taking plant material and spraying it with chemicals that can mimic the high from marijuana. It is sold under names like K2, AK47, Spice, Kush, Kronik, and Scooby Snax.

The chemicals also can also be mixed into a liquid and vaped, and even mixed into tea or food. The substances can produce some similar effects to traditional marijuana including relaxation, elevated mood and altered perception.

WHAT'S IN FAKE WEED?

Authorities have detected scores of chemicals in synthetic marijuana, and say [chemical](#) composition can vary not only from product to product but from batch to batch. Some ingredients are banned by federal or state law. Drug dealers peddle fake [weed](#), and police say people have been able to buy it online or in convenience stores and gas stations.

Fake weed products are not tested for safety and people who use them don't know exactly what chemicals they're putting into their bodies.

Earlier this year, more than 160 people in Illinois were sickened and at least four died after using synthetic marijuana tainted with rat poison.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS?

Fake pot can cause vomiting, hallucinations, seizures, rapid heartbeat and kidney damage severe enough to put users on dialysis.

It also can be addictive and has been tied to violent behavior and suicidal thoughts

Health officials track reports of illnesses related to synthetic marijuana through hospital emergency department visits or poison center calls. Poison centers report thousands of cases each year including nearly 8,000 in 2015. This year, as of last month, poison control centers handled about 1,300 synthetic [marijuana](#) calls.

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