

# Parents360

## *Synthetic Drugs: Bath Salts, K2/Spice:*

### *A guide for parents and other influencers*

THE PARTNERSHIP™  
AT DRUGFREE.ORG

---

February 16, 2012

## Parents360

**Synthetic Drugs:  
Bath Salts, K2/Spice**

THE PARTNERSHIP™  
AT DRUGFREE.ORG

Hello, and welcome to the Parents360 module that addresses issues pertaining to synthetic drugs such as Bath Salts and K2/Spice.

Some background to start: “Parents360 – Parents: You Matter” is a community education presentation that helps parents and other adults who care about kids learn how to communicate effectively with their children, look out for them and get them help if and when they need it. The presentation has a number of drug-specific modules that can be added to it. The one we’re talking about today is Synthetic Drugs such as Bath Salts and K2/Spice.

This is a very important topic to address because synthetic drugs **are** dangerous. They are not ‘safe’ as a second choice, or as an alternative to more well-known drugs, for your kids, and you must communicate that fact with them. This presentation will help provide you with the information and resources to have that discussion.

### “Bath Salts” are not Bath Salts



The first thing that parents should know is that the drug called Bath Salts is very different from the product that you put into a bath. The only reason why they have the same name is because the products look similar like a fine powder.

### What are “Bath Salts?”

- Stimulants: Manmade chemicals related to amphetamines (speed)
- Substituted cathinones -- Methylenedioxypropylvalerone (MDPV) and mephedrone, and methylone are the chemicals most often found in “bath salts”
- Consumed orally or nasally

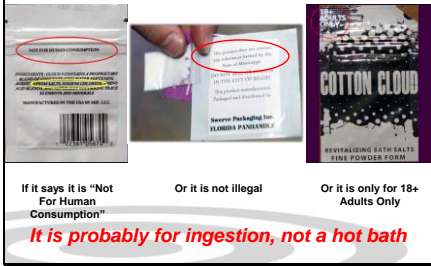
Drug Enforcement Administration

So – what are Bath Salts anyway? They are a man-made, chemical (as opposed to organic) stimulant drug. Generally, stimulants are a class of drugs that elevate mood, increase feelings of well-being and increase energy and alertness. Amphetamines, or speed, are an example of stimulant drugs.

The technical term for Bath Salts is “substituted cathinone.” Now, what does that mean? You may have heard of Khat, a plant that is cultivated and used in East Africa and the Middle East. It has a stimulant effect on the user and can be quite dangerous. Substituted cathinones are synthetic, concentrated versions of the stimulant chemical in Khat. Methylenedioxypropylvalerone (MDPV), mephedrone and methylone are the chemicals most often found in “Bath Salts.”

They can be ingested orally or snorted through the nose.

### How can you tell?



So – how can you tell if something that is labeled as a bath salt is really a drug?

Well, first off, if it is contained in a packet that is about the size of a moist towelette, it probably isn't designed for use in a bathtub that can hold anywhere from 30 to 60 gallons of water.

But if it also says, “not for human consumption,” says that it is “not illegal” (never a good sign) or that it is for “adults only,” it is probably a drug that was created for ingestion and not for a hot bath.

### Many Brands and Names and Not Always Sold as Bath Salts



What makes this even trickier is that not all “Bath Salts” are marketed as Bath Salts.

Substituted cathinones and related drugs have been sold as plant feeder, insect repellent and even stain remover.

It is also important to note that there is no standard formulation for these drugs. The composition of chemicals that is sold in one packet may be completely different than what is sold in an identical packet.

So – why all of the mystery?

It is because when these drugs were legal, the people trying to sell them were working to exploit very specific loopholes in the law. For a period of time, these drugs were not illegal because the law did not include them. That has changed, and we will talk about that in a moment. But once word went out that Bath Salts were dangerous, the distributors of these drugs put them in new, deceiving packages.

## Why Do Teens Use “Bath Salts”?

- For energy / alternative to illegal stimulants
- Perceived to be legal
- Not picked up on standard drug tests
- Available at retail outlets: convenience stores; head shops; online



So why would a teen or young adult, or anyone for that matter, make a decision to use “Bath Salts?”

First, we’ll look at some of the same reasons why people use stimulants. For some, it is to get high or escape, but for many others it is to get energy or endurance to make it through the day. Many people – not just teens – feel overworked and overstressed, and in those situations, a stimulant can have a lot of appeal.

Peer pressure or curiosity can play a large role, and often teens don’t know what the effects will be until it’s too late. Word of mouth can also play a big part in deciding to try it.

Anecdotally, potential users may think that Bath Salts are safer than methamphetamine. They may perceive them to be legal. They may think that they would not test positive – at work or at school – if they use it.

And these drugs are readily available – if you walk into some convenience stores or gas stations, you may see a whole display of pills and packages marked as “vitamins” or “energy boosters.” Some may be legal, and some may not be. Head shops – which are in the business of selling drug paraphernalia just within the limits of the law – may sell these drugs, and a search for Bath Salts online yields more than 1.3 million results.

## Effects of “Bath Salts”

- Very severe paranoia that sometimes causes users to harm themselves or others.
- Speed of onset – 15 minutes; Length of high – 4-6 hours
- Long term effects: Unknown
- Effects reported to Poison Control Centers
  - Suicidal thoughts
  - Agitation; Combative/Violent; Confusion
  - Hallucinations / psychosis
  - Increased heart rate; Hypertension; Chest Pain
  - Death or serious injury

Source: American Association of Poison Control Centers

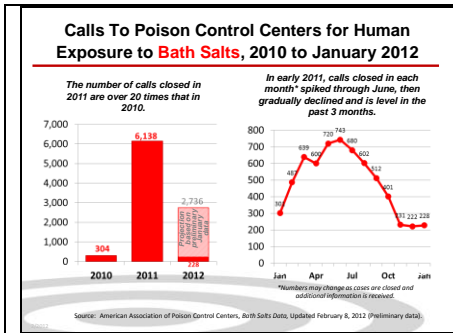
The effects of Bath Salts can be severe.

Very severe paranoia can sometimes cause users to harm themselves or others. Effects reported to Poison Control Centers include:

Suicidal thoughts  
Agitation  
Combative/Violent behavior  
Confusion  
Hallucinations/psychosis  
Increased heart rate  
Hypertension  
Chest Pain  
Death or serious injury

The speed of onset is 15 minutes, while the length of the high from these drugs is four to six hours.

It is especially troubling that the long-term effects of the drug are unknown, because the drug has only been used widely within the past decade. We don’t know what the future will hold or exactly how people will be affected.



Poison centers first raised the alarm about Bath Salts in December 2010 after they started receiving calls about people having serious reactions to the chemicals, such as increased blood pressure and heart rate, agitation, hallucinations, extreme paranoia and delusions. In 2010, poison centers received 304 calls about exposures to Bath Salts. That number rose dramatically in 2011 when poison centers received 6,138 calls. In early 2011, calls closed in each month\* spiked through June, then gradually declined and was level in November and December 2011 and January 2012. While this is notable progress, projections based on January 2012 data indicate that use will remain far above 2010 levels in 2012.

## Synthetic Marijuana, K2 / "Spice"




We now make the move from salts to Spice.

- ### Synthetic Marijuana
- K2 or "Spice" are common names for synthetic marijuana, *however, the effects of synthetic marijuana can be very different from cultivated marijuana*
  - K2 or "Spice" is a mixture of herbs or dried, shredded plant material that is typically sprayed with chemicals that are similar to THC, the psychoactive ingredients in marijuana.
  - **Street names:** Bliss, Black Mamba, Bombay Blue, Blaze, Genie, Spice, Zohai, JWH-018, -073, -250

"K2" and "Spice" are street names for synthetic marijuana. Whatever perceptions people have of marijuana, they should not underestimate the risk of this drug or make the mistake that synthetic marijuana is somehow less dangerous than cultivated marijuana.

K2 or Spice is a mixture of herbs or other plant materials that have been sprayed with artificial chemicals that are supposed to mimic the effects of THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. One group of these artificial chemicals has the prefix "JWH," so you will see JWH-018, JWH-073 and others. It is important to note that K2/Spice is completely synthetic, so while these drugs may act on the same parts of the brain and body as THC, the effects can be very different.

In addition to the most common names, K2 and Spice, this product is sold under a number of trade names such as "Blaze," "Bliss," "Black Mamba," "Bombay Blue," "Genie" or by the names of the chemicals that are used in the production process such as JWH-018.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Signs of Use</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong clove smell</li> <li>• Coffee grinder – finer the powder, easier to smoke</li> <li>• Drug paraphernalia (pipes, screens, etc.)</li> <li>• Typically smoked</li> </ul> 	<p>One of the signs that parents can look for is a strong clove smell. K2/Spice is typically smoked, so parents may find a coffee grinder around the house – which is often used to reduce the product to a fine powder so that it is easier to smoke – and other drug paraphernalia such as pipes or screens.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Physical Signs of Use</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of control</li> <li>• Lack of pain response</li> <li>• Increased agitation</li> <li>• Pale skin</li> <li>• Seizures</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Profuse sweating</li> <li>• Uncontrolled / spastic body movements</li> <li>• Elevated blood pressure, heart rate, and palpitations</li> </ul>  <p><small>Source: Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan</small></p>	<p>The physical signs of use are very troubling.</p> <p>You may notice increased agitation, profuse sweating, pale skin or vomiting.</p> <p>But what may be of the greatest concern is the loss of physical control – a kind of brain-body disconnect. This is where you may see seizures, a lack of pain response or uncontrolled/spastic body movements.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Effects of Synthetic Marijuana</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Onset – 3-5 minutes</li> <li>• Length of duration – 1-8 hours</li> <li>• Short-term effects: In addition to physical signs of use, users may experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Dysphoria – the opposite of euphoria</li> <li>– Paranoia – similar to PCP / Angel Dust</li> <li>– Delusions, hallucinations and increased agitation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Long-term effects: <b>Unknown</b></li> </ul>  <p><small>Source: Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan</small></p>	<p>Looking at the effects another way, parents should know that the onset of this drug is fairly quick, and – depending on a number of factors – the length of the high can last from one to eight hours.</p> <p>The paranoia that is associated with K2/Spice is closer to the psychological reaction to PCP or angel dust than to the paranoia associated with marijuana.</p> <p>One of the most frightening factors is that users may experience dysphoria. The best way to explain dysphoria is that it is the opposite of euphoria. A spice user posted a blog comment that read in part, “I felt as if I was in hell – this morbid place that I couldn’t get out of.” (<a href="http://cenblog.org/terra-sigillata/2010/09/07/whats-the-buzz-synthetic-marijuana-k2-spice-jwh-018/">http://cenblog.org/terra-sigillata/2010/09/07/whats-the-buzz-synthetic-marijuana-k2-spice-jwh-018/</a>)</p> <p>As troubling as the short-term effects of this drug are, what is even more concerning is the fact that no one knows what their long-term effects will be. They simply haven’t been around long enough for medical professionals to know how users will be affected in 10 years, 20 years or even further in the future.</p>

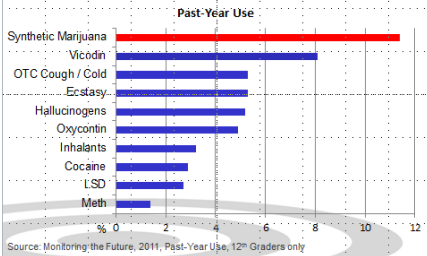
### How is K2 obtained?

- K2 is typically sold in small, silvery plastic bags of dried leaves and marketed as incense that can be smoked. It is said to resemble potpourri.
- K2 is sold online, in convenience stores and in "head" shops, and is usually marketed as incense.



Like Bath Salts, K2/Spice is sold online, in convenience stores and in "head" shops. It is often marketed as incense.

### K2 / Spice Use

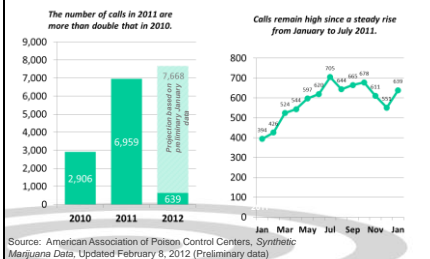


While these drugs may be "news" to many parents, more than one in 10 American high school seniors used synthetic marijuana in the prior year according to the "Monitoring the Future" study, a survey conducted by the University of Michigan,.

At 11.4 percent, the annual prevalence of synthetic marijuana is:  
 41 percent greater than Vicodin (8.1 percent)  
 Four times greater than inhalants (3.2 percent)  
 Four times greater than cocaine (2.9 percent)  
 Eight times greater than meth (1.4 percent)

It is also more common than hallucinogens, LSD and OxyContin and twice as likely to be used as over-the-counter cough/cold medicine.

### Calls Received by Poison Control Centers for Human Exposure to Synthetic Marijuana, 2010 to January 2012



Calls to poison control centers for exposure to synthetic marijuana doubled between 2010 and 2011 and is on track to rise again in 2012.

## DEA takes action

- On November 24, 2010, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) took emergency action to temporarily control five chemicals used to make K2 and other "fake pot" products.
- On September 7, 2011, the DEA banned three of the drugs found in bath salts
- Possessing and selling these chemicals or the products that contain is now illegal in the U.S.
- The DEA will study these chemicals to determine if these products should be permanently controlled.
- Congress is also working to act on this issue.
- Regulators face the challenge of staying ahead of formulations

In the past two years, the Drug Enforcement Administration has taken emergency action to make both Bath Salts and K2/Spice illegal. There is now a study period taking place to determine if these bans will remain permanent.

The challenge for regulators and parents, however, is to stay ahead of the new formulas and versions of these drugs that may not be covered by current law.

Congress is also working to act on this issue.

However, regulators and parents face the challenge of staying ahead of new formulations.

## Messages Parents Can Deliver

- It is impossible to know what these drugs contain, or who made them, or what you are going to get.
- Getting high – no matter how – carries risks of making unsafe or unhealthy decisions
- Just because a drug is legal – or is labeled as legal – does not mean that it is safe
- We don't know the long term effects of synthetic drugs because the drugs are so new

So what can parents and other influencers say to young people about the dangers of these drugs?

A good overarching message to kids is to avoid putting anything in their bodies that would change their feelings or emotions – whether it is something they would smoke, drink, take in pill form or shoot with a needle. The human brain is an incredible machine, and you need to be even more careful with a teenage brain because it is a work in progress.

Additional messages include:

- It is impossible to know what these drugs contain, who made them or what you are going to get.
- Getting high – no matter how – carries risks of making unsafe or unhealthy decisions.
- Just because a drug is legal – or is labeled as legal – does not mean that it is safe.
- We don't know the long-term effects of synthetic drugs because the drugs are so new.



## Drugfree.org Resources

### PREVENT

- [TimeToTalk](#) helps you start the conversation
- [Habla Con Tus Hijos](#)-Spanish-language version
- [The Decoder](#) blog
- [The Drug Guide for Parents](#)

### INTERVENE

- [Time to Act](#) if you think or know your child is using.
- [Intervene](#) blog
- [Intervention eBook](#)

### GET TREATMENT

- [Treatment eBook](#)
- [Time to Get Help](#) helps parents better understand teen and young adult substance abuse and addiction.

### RECOVER

- [Time to Get Help community](#) connects parents who understand and have been there.

*You are not alone*

The Partnership at Drugfree.org's "Time To Talk" resource, found at [TimeToTalk.org](#), offers easy-to-use, research-based tips to help you have ongoing conversations with your kids to keep them healthy and drug free.

[HablaConTusHijos.org](#) is the Spanish-language version of Time to Talk.

The Decoder blog addresses real issues that real parents face every day.

The Drug Guide for Parents shares facts about the top 13 drugs most commonly abused by teens.

Time to Act! provides parents with step-by-step guidance on what to do if they think or know that their child is using.

The Intervene blog is a forum for experts, parents and caring adults to share their experiences and insights.

The Intervention eBook provides parents with an additional way to learn about how to help their child.

The Treatment eBook provides parents with a guide to understanding what treatment is, how to pay for it, how to start treatment and more.

Time to Get Help gives parents a better understanding of teen and young adult substance abuse and addiction and a community to share their experiences and support one another.

A key message that we want to deliver to parents and other people who care about kids is that whether you are working to prevent use by their child, responding to it or supporting your child's recovery, you are not alone

## Connect with The Partnership at Drugfree.org



HELPLINE  
1- 855 -  
DRUGFREE



FACEBOOK  
/partnershipdrugfree



eNewsletter  
News & tips in  
your inbox.



TWITTER  
@drugnews

Drugfree.org/eNewsletters

We want families to connect with the Partnership.

The Partnership at Drugfree.org's Parents Toll-Free Helpline offers assistance to parents who want to talk to someone about their child's drug use and drinking.

Our Helpline is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm ET. We are closed on weekends and holidays. The Helpline is not a crisis line. If you do not connect with a parent specialist, please leave a message and we will make every effort to get back to you by the next business day. If you are in need of immediate or emergency services please call 911 or a 24-hour crisis hotline.

Our eNewsletters are a great way to get updated information about substance abuse and actions parents can take to help their kids delivered directly to your inbox.

You can friend us on Facebook, or you can follow our Twitter feed.

We try to provide as many ways as possible to for you to keep in touch with us!

THE PARTNERSHIP™  
AT DRUGFREE.ORG

**PARENTS360**  
*Thank You!*



In the coming months, we will be creating additional slidecasts that use content from the Parents360 presentation and modules.

If you would like to be notified when these screencasts are published, please be sure to sign up for the Community Education newsletter at drugfree.org, or "like" The Partnership at Drugfree.org on Facebook.

Thank you for your time, your attention and for your concern for the young people in your life.

## Acknowledgement

This project was supported by Grant No. 2010-DB-BX-K025 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.



## The Tip Sheet

Here are important tips, resources and information you can use to give your kids happy, healthy and safe futures, and help them avoid the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

### COMMUNICATE

1. Clearly communicate the risks of alcohol and drug use
2. Let your child know you disapprove of any drinking or drug use.
  - a. Kids who believe their parents will be upset if they try drugs are 43 percent less likely to do so.
3. Use teachable moments to talk about drinking and using drugs.
4. Frequently talk and listen to your kids about how things are going in their lives.

### MONITOR

1. Know *WHO* your child is with
2. Know *WHAT* they're doing
3. Know *WHERE* your child will be
4. Know *WHEN* your child is expected home
5. Know who your teen's friends are – communicate with their parents
6. Establish and enforce rules – including a clear “no use” policy

### SPOT ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

- ✓ Here are **five** changes to watch for...
  1. Declining school work and grades
  2. Abrupt changes in friends, groups or behavior
  3. Sleeping habits and abnormal health issues
  4. Deteriorating relationships with family
  5. Less openness and honesty
- ✓ Be aware of special vulnerabilities

## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SPOT ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

1. Focus, you can do this
  - ✓ Don't panic, but act right away
2. Start talking
  - ✓ Let your child know you are concerned
  - ✓ Communicate your disapproval
3. Set limits, rules and consequences
4. Monitor – look for evidence, make lists, keep track
5. Get outside/professional help – you don't have to do this alone

## TAKE ACTION AND LEARN MORE

1. Talk to your kids about the dangers of drinking and using drugs
2. Monitor your kid's whereabouts
3. Connect with other parents
4. Learn more about preventing teen drinking and drug use– go to [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

## IMPORTANT RESOURCES FROM THE PARTNERSHIP AT DRUGFREE.ORG

1. [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org) – Main Site
2. [www.timetotalk.org](http://www.timetotalk.org) – Learn **how to start a conversation** with your child
3. [www.drugfree.org/timetoact](http://www.drugfree.org/timetoact) – Learn **what to do if you suspect or know** your child is using
4. [www.drugfree.org/teenbrain](http://www.drugfree.org/teenbrain) – Learn about **teen brain development** and how you can help your teen make smart, healthy decisions
5. [www.drugfree.org/parent](http://www.drugfree.org/parent) – The Parent Tool Kit offers videos & articles on how to talk with your kids at any age