



# Synthetic Drugs in Louisiana

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## Synthetic Stimulants Marketed as Bath Salts

Across the United States, synthetic stimulants that are sold as “bath salts” have become a serious drug abuse threat. These products are produced under a variety of faux brand names, and they are indirectly marketed as legal alternatives to cocaine, amphetamines, and Ecstasy (MDMA). Poison control centers nationwide have received hundreds of calls related to the side effects of, and overdoses from, the use of these potent and unpredictable products. Numerous media reports have cited bath salt stimulant overdose incidents that have resulted in emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and severe psychotic episodes. Some of these episodes have led to violent outbursts, self-inflicted wounds, and even suicides. A number of states and the federal government have imposed emergency measures to ban bath salt stimulant products.

## Packaging, Availability, and Use

Bath salt stimulants are sold in powder form in small plastic or foil packages under various names such as “Ivory Wave,” “Cloud Nine,” “Vanilla Sky,” etc. Although quantities vary, 200 and 500 milligram packets are common, and the prices range from \$25 to \$70 depending on the quantity and brand name. Bath salt products are sold over the Internet and at retail locations such as head shops, discount tobacco shops, gas stations, convenience store, etc. Bath salt products are most commonly snorted, but the products may also be smoked, swallowed, or injected intravenously as a solution.

## Active Chemical Contents

Most of the bath salt stimulant products on the market today likely contain MDPV (3, 4-Methylenedioxypropylvalerone) as the primary chemical stimulant. Other products may contain mephedrone. Both MDPV and mephedrone are synthetic derivatives of cathinone, which is the main chemical stimulant in Khat. Cathinone is a potent central nervous system (CNS) stimulant that is structurally similar to amphetamine.

## Effects

Mephedrone produces CNS stimulation, psychoactivity, and hallucinations. Adverse physical effects may include a rapid increase in heart rate, chest pains, nosebleeds, sweating, nausea, and vomiting; psychological effects may include agitation, irritability, dizziness, insomnia, depression, delusions, paranoia, and suicidal thoughts. Higher doses have produced intense and prolonged panic attacks and psychotic episodes that have resulted in violent behavior.



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# Synthetic Marijuana

Over the past several years, smokable herbal blends marketed as being “legal” and providing a marijuana-like high have become increasingly popular, particularly among teens and young adults. These products consist of plant material that has been coated with research chemicals that mimic THC, which is the active ingredient in marijuana, and are sold at a variety of retail outlets, in head shops, and over the Internet. These chemicals, however, have not been approved by the FDA for human consumption and there is no oversight of the manufacturing process. Brands such as “Spice,” “K2,” “Blaze,” and “Red X Dawn” are labeled as incense to mask their intended purpose.

Since 2009, DEA has received an increasing number of reports from poison centers, hospitals, and law enforcement regarding these products. Louisiana and other states have already taken action to control one or more of these chemicals. The Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 amends the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) to allow the DEA Administrator to emergency schedule an abused, harmful, non-medical substance in order to avoid an imminent public health crisis while the formal rule-making procedures described in the CSA are being conducted.

## Packaging, Availability, and Use

Synthetic marijuana, marketed as Spice, Red X Dawn, and K2, is an herbal substance that is sold as smoking material in various sized packets of incense or potpourri to mask its actual intention. “Spice” is purported to contain substances with marijuana-like psychoactive effects (e.g., HU-210, HU-211, JWH-018, JWH-073 and CP 47,947 & homologues) and it may be abused via smoking. Synthetic marijuana products are sold over the Internet and at retail locations, such as head shops, discount tobacco shops, gas stations, convenience store, etc.



## Active Chemical Contents

- HU-210 is both chemically and pharmacologically similar to  $\Delta^9$ -THC, the main active ingredient in marijuana.
- HU-211 is chemically, but not pharmacologically similar to  $\Delta^9$ -THC
- JWH-018, JWH-073 and CP 47,947 are pharmacologically, but not chemically, similar to  $\Delta^9$ -THC

## Effects

Synthetic marijuana has been known to cause agitation, anxiety, tachycardia, hypertension, vomiting and in serious cases, psychotic hallucinations that can last for days.

## Statistics

All emergency visits to the hospitals in Louisiana regarding synthetic drugs are to be reported to Louisiana State Poison Control.

	BATH SALTS		SYNTHETIC MARIJUANA	
	Louisiana	Nationally	Louisiana	Nationally
2010	168	303	64	2315
2011	159	6900	132	7100+

This data brief is brought to you by the Louisiana Drug Enforcement Administration and the Louisiana State Epidemiology Workgroup. To find data related to substance use and abuse, please visit the State Epidemiology Workgroup Online Data system at [www.gov.state.la.us/lasocialindicators](http://www.gov.state.la.us/lasocialindicators).

