

NOT SO LEGAL AFTER ALL

It's a Tuesday afternoon, and you're studying with your best friend after school. You're getting bored and hungry, so you ask your friend if he has any good snacks. He pulls a bag of chips out of his backpack...and then a bag of something else.

"Dude, look what Sam gave me," he says. "It's fake weed." You're confused. What's fake weed? He says, "This stuff gets you high - and it's legal!"

Not so fast! Synthetic Marijuana, sometimes sold as "Fake Weed", "K2", "Spice", "Genie," "Mojo," or Zohai," used to be legal in the United States. That's until July 10, 2012, when the President signed the Synthetic Drug Abuse Prevention Act of 2012. Synthetic compounds commonly found in synthetic marijuana were banned, placing them under Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act. Many states have passed similar laws to keep synthetic marijuana off the streets. But these regulations haven't stopped manufactures from designing new versions of the drug that don't include these outlawed compounds. This is why you might see fake weed sold in stores and online. These new versions are as bad, or worse than the banned versions.

A SAFE ALTERNATIVE?

Not really.

When most people smoke synthetic marijuana, they expect to be relaxed and super mellow. Getting high on synthetic marijuana isn't like that. Scientists say that the toxic chemicals cause people to feel anxious, paranoid and panicky.

Most researchers agree that the toxic chemicals in fake weed could be more dangerous than those in marijuana. Some teens get so sick after smoking fake weed that they have to be rushed to the hospital.



WHAT'S IN FAKE WEED, ANYWAY?

Would you drink a cup of strange-looking liquid just because someone handed it to you and told you it was safe? Most people would turn and run the other direction. You don't want to put something in your body if you don't know what it is, right?

Well, that's the problem with synthetic marijuana (and with a lot of illegal drugs, too). You never know what you're buying? You might pay \$20 for a bag of "Spice", but you could be buying a bag of useless potpourri, or a bag of poison. You won't know until it's too late.

Synthetic marijuana is made of a bunch of dried herbs and plants that have been sprayed with lab-created chemicals that are designed to mimic the effects of marijuana. The really scary thing is that these chemicals - also known as "synthetic cannabinoids" - are unregulated. That means no one's in charge of making sure that the chemicals won't hurt you. The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has recently put laws in place that ban the sale, possession and distribution of the synthetic cannabinoids in fake weed. They exercised its emergency scheduling authority to control five chemicals that are used to create fake weed (JWH-018, JWH-073, JWH-200, CP-47,497 and cannabicyclohexanol).

With synthetic marijuana, you have no idea what you're putting into your body and you have no idea what those chemicals are going to do to your brain.



PUFF, PUFF, PASS OUT

David's Story.

David wasn't the stoner type. He didn't even smoke cigarettes or drink. David spent most of his time playing basketball, doing his homework, or hanging out with his friends. The high school sophomore was really looking forward to summer vacation - he was going to basketball camp for a week and then he could hang out with his friends the rest of the summer.

Unfortunately, David's vacation didn't go as planned. Just a few weeks before the end of the semester, David and his friend Mario bought a bag of "K2". They heard it was safe to use, so they figured it would be okay to try it out.

They went back to David's room with some rolling papers and smoked the synthetic marijuana. Nothing happened. Then Mario started laughing, and David started laughing, too. Then David started coughing and couldn't stop. His heart was racing and he started to feel really hot. He tried to stand up, but his vision blurred. David blacked out and fell to the floor.

Mario stopped laughing and panicked. He thought that his friend had overdosed. When the ambulance came, David was still unconscious.

David woke up terrified in the hospital. The doctor said he had a reaction to something in the synthetic marijuana - but there's no way of knowing what exactly caused him to black out.

Luckily for David, he hasn't had any health problems since waking up in the hospital. His summer vacation is ruined, though - his parents were so angry that they canceled his trip to basketball camp, and he's grounded for the rest of the summer.

