

**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
2020 – PAHAN – 515 – 07-11-ADV**

Increased in Overdoses Associated with Synthetic Cannabinoid Use – Lehigh County

DATE:	7/11/2020
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Rachel Levine, MD, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Increase in Overdoses Associated with Synthetic Cannabinoids Use – Lehigh County
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	Statewide
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Advisory” provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

- Since Friday July 3rd, EMS in Lehigh County have been involved with over 70 K2 calls.
- Lehigh County has been seeing elevated numbers of Any Drug overdoses involving unspecified drugs.

Synthetic cannabinoids, known by the brand names K2 or spice, are substances that attempt to mimic the effects of marijuana, but are not marijuana. While marijuana has one active ingredient, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), synthetic cannabinoids can include any of over 700 active chemicals, some many times stronger than THC. Typically, producers spray a mixture of these drugs onto dried plant matter (leaves, flowers, resin), which is then smoked. To satisfy demand and escape criminalization, the chemical composition of the synthetic cannabinoids is regularly changed as particular compounds become regulated. This results in products with unpredictable and toxic effects, summarized below.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health is alerting medical personnel that: (1) A rise in the number of patients presenting with unusual symptoms, including aggression or paranoia, may be attributed to synthetic cannabinoid intoxication; (2) Synthetic cannabinoid products can be toxic. As a result, people who smoke these products can react with rapid heart rate, vomiting, agitation, confusion, and hallucinations. Some have to get help from emergency medical services or in hospital emergency departments or intensive care units; (3) While there is currently no evidence the synthetic cannabinoids are mixed with opioids, there have been incidents related to synthetic cannabinoid + fentanyl overdoses in the past. Patients who smoked K2 and have symptoms of opioid intoxication may be unaware that they have taken fentanyl. Higher doses of naloxone may be required to revive these individuals.

Additional information on synthetic cannabinoids can be found on CDC’s Synthetic Cannabinoids: An Overview for Healthcare Providers: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/chemicals/sc/healthcare.html> and you can receive further guidance about the management of patients with possible synthetic cannabinoid-related illness by contacting your local poison center (1-800-222-1222).

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
- Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
- Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of July 11, 2020, but may be modified in the future.