

SYNTHETIC CANNABIS

Synthetic cannabis has been sold since 2004 and is one of the three most common types of 'new psychoactive substances' or NPS. This drug was designed to mimic the effects of cannabis and its active ingredient, THC or tetrahydrocannabinol, which is the psychoactive ingredient found in the *Cannabis sativa* plant.

Synthetic cannabis is made by mixing powdered chemicals with solvents designed to try and replicate THC. This is then sprayed onto organic matter such as dried herbs and packaged, branded and marketed for sale in colourful packages under different brand names like Mojo, Lightening Gold and Kronic. Synthetic cannabis may also be marketed as aphrodisiac tea, herbal incense or potpourri.

HOW CAN SYNTHETIC CANNABIS AFFECT YOU?

The actual ingredients of synthetic cannabis often change and experimental chemicals used in unknown quantities in the production of the drug, make synthetic cannabis use unpredictable. This can impact the health consequences of use because it's difficult to predict the strengths and effects of synthetic cannabis before use.

Packaging of synthetic cannabis can be misleading with not all ingredients being listed or the amounts of each ingredient stated correctly. This can increase the risk of use and affect the treatment for the drug in an emergency.

What we do know about synthetic cannabis is that this drug is supposed to cause similar effects to that of cannabis such as mild euphoria, relaxation, impaired balance and coordination, and loss of concentration.

Synthetic cannabis can also cause additional and potentially more harmful side effects including fast and irregular heartbeat, agitation and paranoia. Some people have even reported that synthetic cannabis has caused a whole range of unpleasant effects such as aggressive and violent behaviour, vomiting, acute kidney injury, seizures, stroke and death. The effects are determined by the different chemicals used to make the drug which can change from batch to batch making it challenging to predict what effects the user may experience.

WHAT'S THE LAW SAY?

It's really important to know that the purchase and use of synthetic cannabis is now illegal in Australia. From 2015, WA introduced new laws on possessing or selling any substance that has a psychoactive effect other than alcohol, tobacco and food (*Misuse of Drugs Amendment [Psychoactive Substances] 2015*). This means that anyone caught with synthetic cannabis could be charged with possession, selling, supplying or intent to sell or supply.

The potential harms of synthetic cannabis can be summed up in these three key messages:

1. Synthetic cannabis consists of organic matter that is sprayed with unknown and changing chemical compounds, which can have negative impacts on a person's physical and/or mental wellbeing.
2. Synthetic cannabis is not legal. In WA, it's illegal to possess, use, manufacture, cultivate or supply an illicit drug including synthetic cannabis.
3. Experimental chemicals used in unknown quantities makes using synthetic cannabis dangerous and unpredictable.



NEED HELP?

If you or anyone you know is experiencing a drug use issue, contact WA's 24hr Drug and Alcohol Support Line.

- Metro (08) 9442 5000
- Country 1800 198 024
- Emergency 000

Live chat with a qualified and experienced drug counsellor is also offered at:
<http://drugaware.com.au>

