

Understanding synthetic cannabis.

1800 700 514 (Freecall)
unitingvictas.org.au/aod

What is synthetic cannabis?

Synthetic cannabis or synthetic cannabinoids are substances that were created to mimic the effects of cannabis. However, they're not actually a synthetic (i.e. fake or artificial) version of the drug they are named after, and the name is misleading. These drugs often cause effects not normally experienced when using cannabis itself, and can cause many negative and unpredictable effects.

These substances are sold online, mostly from international websites that offer a range of synthetic substances (also known as new psychoactive substances or NPS). They come in the form of powders or capsules, or as chemicals mixed with liquids and sprayed on herbs. They're sold in colourful packs with brand names such as Kronic, Diablo, Northern Lights, K2 and Kaos.

Common effects include:

- Feeling relaxed
- Euphoria

Negative effects include:

- Altered perception
- Loss of coordination
- Dehydration
- Weight gain
- Vomiting
- Agitation
- Anxiety
- Aggressive behaviour
- Increase body temperature
- Seizures
- Breathing difficulties
- Chest pain
- Stroke
- Increased blood pressure
- Psychosis
- Death

Reducing risks

As with all substances, there's no safe level of use - they all carry risks. Synthetic cannabis will have a different effect on people depending on:

- Your size, weight, and current level of wellbeing
- If you're using other drugs and the amount you take
- The strength of the drug, which is different from batch to batch
- The location and your current mood.

These factors can influence the effects, and your experience may vary and be different to what you anticipated.

If you use synthetic cannabis:

- Chop into even sized pieces
- Take small doses especially if using a new batch
- Expect the unexpected
- Don't use alone
- Avoid combining with other substances
- Keep informed by checking for drug alerts regularly.

The future is bright.



Overdose awareness

Effects can be unpredictable and dangerous if synthetic drugs are mixed with other legal or illegal drugs.

If mixed with antidepressants the following can occur:

- Fever
- Fast heart rate
- Convulsions
- Organ failure
- Death

If mixed with stimulants the following can occur:

- Increased anxiety
- Intense swings between ups and downs
- Stimulate strain on heart and cause stroke
- Psychosis

Because these are new drugs, the evidence and knowledge are limited and the long-term effects have not been fully explored yet. If you or someone you're with takes a drug that is having an unexpected effect, Naloxone can save a life.

There is a high risk of overdose with this drug category.

Signs of overdose:

- Chest pain and/or fast or irregular heart rate
- Difficulty breathing
- Extreme rise in body temperature
- Delusions
- Loss of consciousness
- Blue lips or pale complexion

Call 000 and ask for an ambulance if you or someone you're with experiences any of the above.

Understanding the risks of withdrawal

Withdrawal effects can include:

Depressive feelings, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, resurfacing of pre-existing issues, agitation and aggression.

Contacts

If you want to talk to someone about your own or someone else's alcohol or other drug use, you can get more information from these Victorian and Tasmanian state-wide services. If you are located in another state, these contacts will direct you to your local support services:

DirectLine

24/7 service offering counselling, information and referrals.

T 1800 888 236

directline.org.au

Harm Reduction Victoria

Support and information from other drug using peers.

T 03 9329 1500

hrvic.org.au

QUIT

T 13 78 48

quit.org.au

Family Drug and Gambling Help

Victorian support for family members.

T 1300 660 068

sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/family-drug-gambling-help

Drug alerts

health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/drug-alerts

Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Tasmania Service Directory

atdc.org.au/service-directory

Alcohol and Drug Information Service TAS

24/7 service offering counselling, information and referrals.

T 1800 811 994

Uniting would like to thank consumer partners for drawing on their lived experience to contribute to this series of publications.

