

DAILY NEWS

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UNFOLDING CRISIS

In no way is this junk the Spice of life

K2, also known as Spice, is touted as the synthetic alternative to marijuana because the chemicals in it are supposedly related to those found in marijuana. In reality they are man-made, mind-altering chemicals sprayed on dried, shredded plant material that help make K2 look like a natural product.

The drug was sold at bodegas in New York City as “incense” products and was largely unregulated. As authorities caught on, and made it illegal to buy, sell or possess these chemicals, manufacturers simply changed the chemical composition.

K2 is making a comeback in poorer neighborhoods around the city, including parts of Harlem and in Bedford-Stuyvesant and Bushwick, Brooklyn, because the high is cheap.



**DR. INDRA
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Synthetic pot is widely available near homeless shelters around the city and can-and-bottle recycling centers. A joint can cost as little as a \$1, making it dangerously more attractive to schoolkids.

The high can be unpredictable and include elevated mood, symptoms of psychosis (confusion, paranoia, hallucination) and altered perception. The unpredictability of the high comes from the fact that the chemical compositions are altered frequently and the body's reaction to them is not well known.

Unlike heroin, the problem with K2 is that there is no real standard protocol to detox individuals as its chemical composition is fluid and manufacturers change it from batch to batch. So, addiction treatment centers in the five boroughs have no sure way to stop people from experiencing craving and severe withdrawal symptoms.

Only certain aspects of the withdrawal symptoms can be addressed. So individuals hooked on K2 could find that the best way to obtain relief for the cravings and withdrawal symptoms they face when they stop using is to go back and use K2 again!

Cidambi is the medical director for the New Jersey-based Center for Network Therapy and an expert in addiction medicine.