SEVERE BLEEDING LINKED TO SYNTHETIC CANNABINOID USE

MAY 2018

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and some health departments across the nation are actively investigating more than 100 cases of severe bleeding among people who have used synthetic cannabinoids, or ‘fake marijuana.’ The first cases were reported in Illinois, and cases have now been reported in several other states including Virginia. The synthetic cannabinoid products indicated in these cases have been found to contain brodifacoum, a rat poison.

What are Synthetic Cannabinoids?

Synthetic Cannabinoids (SC) are man-made chemicals sprayed onto dried plant material. Users usually smoke the resulting product; it may also be sold in liquid form to vaporize in an e-cigarette or other electronic vaping device. Brand names include Spice, K2, Black Mamba, Scooby Snax, Genie, and others. SC are advertised by their manufacturers as an all-natural, safe, and legal way to get ‘high.’ But synthetic cannabinoids are NOT legal, they are NOT natural, and they are NOT safe. SC are not tested for safety or purity. Manufactures constantly change recipes to avoid prosecution; identical packages could contain completely different products. Users don’t really know exactly what chemicals they are putting into their bodies or what will happen. The effects of synthetic cannabinoids can be unpredictable and life-threatening, including:

- Severe agitation and anxiety.
- Fast, racing heartbeat and higher blood pressure.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Muscle spasms, seizures, and tremors.
- Intense hallucinations and psychotic episodes.
- Suicidal and other harmful thoughts and/or actions.
- (as of March 1st, 2018) Severe unexplained bleeding or bruising. This may include nosebleeds, bleeding of the gums, blood in the urine or stool, excessive bleeding from cuts/wounds, vomiting blood, heavy menstrual bleeding, or excessive back pain.
If you have purchased any synthetic cannabinoid product (e.g. K2, Spice, Synthetic Marijuana, etc.) since March 1, 2018, do not use it. If you begin to experience severe unexplained bleeding or bruising and have used one of these products, seek medical care immediately. If you have used a SC product recently but are not experiencing severe bleeding or bruising, you should still see a doctor. Symptoms may develop later. A health care facility can do a test to determine if you need treatment before symptoms appear.

Health care providers should consult the Blue Ridge Poison Center for advice on patient management (1-800-222-1222).

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