

what is spice?

The term 'Spice' refers to a brand name of a range of smokable herbal mixtures that are sold on the Internet and in various specialised shops in some parts of the world. Although 'Spice' is often used to describe a range of products containing synthetic cannabinoids, sold as a legal herb-based alternative to cannabis, it also refers to a particular brand which has a number of different varieties, e.g. Spice Silver and Spice Diamond. Since the Spice brand first appeared in 2004, a large number of competing products made by other manufacturers have also become available.

The packaging information on these products claims that they are a blend of plant or herbal materials (as many as 14 ingredients) and contain no illegal substances. However, European authorities became concerned that the listed ingredients were unlikely to produce their reported effects and efforts were made to analyse the product and its contents.

On 15 December, 2008 it was announced by the German pharmaceutical company THCParm that the synthetic cannabinoid JWH-018 had been identified as one of the active components in at least three varieties of the Spice brand. JWH-018 is a synthetic cannabinoid first synthesized in 1995 for experimental purposes. It is a naphthoylindole, which belongs to the aminoalkylindole family, i.e. the chemical structure differs substantially from Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), but it produces similar effects in animal experiments and has been reported to be more potent than THC.

Since that time, a number of European countries have tested materials sold as Spice, and by 2009, in addition to JWH-108, eight other synthetic cannabinoids had been identified in these products.

New psychoactive substances continue to be identified by authorities, with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) reporting 41 new drugs in 2010. Eleven of these were synthetic cannabinoids, bringing the total number of these substances identified up to 27.

is spice legal?

Since 2009, many European countries have made Spice and some of the synthetic cannabinoids contained in the products illegal. These jurisdictions include the UK, Switzerland, Ireland, Poland, France and Germany.

Like the range of 'research chemicals' also available for sale on websites, these products are not necessarily marketed as 'legal highs', with sellers often promoting them as 'not for human consumption' or as an 'exotic incense blend which releases a rich aroma'. Some US sites, however, do promote Spice as a legal high.

According to the EMCDDA 2009 publication – *Understanding the 'Spice' phenomenon*, there are many other similar products marketed under the 'Spice' brand, these include, but are not limited to: Spice Silver, Spice Gold, Spice Diamond, Spice Arctic Synergy, Spice Tropical Synergy, and Spice Egypt. In addition, there are many other herbal preparations for which the claim is made that they have a similar make-up to 'Spice' – e.g. Yucatan Fire, Smoke, Sence, ChillX, Highdi's Almdröhner, Earth Impact, Gorillaz, Skunk, Genie, Galaxy Gold, Space Truckin, Solar Flare, Moon Rocks, Blue Lotus, Aroma, and Scope. As with many online products, some of these are only available for a short period of time before being replaced with others that may or may not be of similar composition.

is Spice safe?

Spice products contain synthetic cannabinoids that are often described as ‘research chemicals.’ Research chemicals are experimental chemicals that are not approved for human consumption. The vast majority of these chemicals have only been recently synthesized and little, if any, data exist currently about their side effects, adverse reactions, long-term damage, or dependence potential. Most importantly, there are no officially published safety data and almost nothing is known about their effects on humans.

Based on the information available, it can be assumed that different amounts or combinations of synthetic cannabinoids are added to many of the Spice products currently available online. This is done to produce the cannabis-like subjective effects that potential users are seeking. Media stories from Europe suggest that some Spice products may have been produced in Asia (e.g. China), but it remains unclear where and how the actual production of the herbal mixtures, the synthetic cannabinoids and their addition to the herbal mixtures takes place.

In Australia, a variety of synthetic cannabinoid products (often referred to as ‘synthetic cannabis’) have become available. As in Europe, these products are usually sold via websites and specialist adult stores. ‘Kronic’ is perhaps the best known of these and has received a great deal of media attention in recent times. Other products available in Australia that contain synthetic cannabinoids include Kalma, Voodoo, Kaos and Mango Kush.

In recent times, Commonwealth, state and territory authorities have become increasingly concerned about such products and are currently considering a request to prohibit a number of synthetic cannabinoid analogues, such as those in Kronic. It is important to note that such Commonwealth scheduling decisions are recommendations to the jurisdictions and the enforcement of restrictions will remain with the states and territories under local legislation.

Ahead of the Commonwealth’s decision on national scheduling of synthetic cannabinoid analogues, several states have taken action to place bans on the possession and sale of products containing these substances within their own jurisdictions.

On 16 June 2011, the Queensland Government announced that it was moving to ban synthetic cannabinoids under the (Qld) Drugs Misuse Act. Fifteen emerging drugs will be captured under this change.

On 17 June 2011, Western Australia listed seven synthetic cannabinoids as banned substances under the (WA) Poisons Act. WA will subsequently complement this action by making changes to the (WA) Misuse of Drugs Act. South Australia similarly implemented controls on 17 substances on the same day.

The NSW Government banned the sale of synthetic cannabinoids as of 1 July, 2011 and the possession of these products was made illegal on 8 July, 2011.

Tasmania is also considering appropriate controls under its own legislation.

In addition to the consideration of domestic controls within each state and territory, the Commonwealth is pursuing broader regulatory options in relation to controlling existing and emerging synthetic analogue drugs.

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It is important to remember that in addition to the possible legal consequences of using these products, we know little about their ingredients and as a result the possible health consequences of using them via any route of administration are as yet unknown.

For more information please see the factsheet [‘synthetic cannabinoids’](#)