Synthetic Drugs – Dangerous and Deadly

One type is marketed as "synthetic marijuana." The other is advertised as "fake cocaine" or "fake meth." Both are marketed as legal equivalents to illegal drugs. But both cause alarming side effects that are generating a slew of calls to poison centers and spurring concern among doctors across the U.S.

America's 57 poison centers first received calls about "synthetic marijuana" in late 2009. During 2010, they received 2,915 calls about these new products. And from January 1 to September 30 this year, they've received 5,083 calls. The synthetic marijuana products sell for between $30 and $40 per 3-gram bag, in packages labeled as incense or potpourri and marketed under brand names like "Spice," "K2," "Genie," "Yucatan Fire," "Sence," "Smoke," "Skunk" and "Zohai."

In December 2010, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency – concerned about reports of people experiencing vomiting, hallucinations, racing heartbeat and elevated blood pressure – moved to make the substances illegal. More than a dozen states had already taken this action.

Late last year, poison centers began to receive calls about products marketed as "bath salts" sold both on the Internet as well as in gas stations and head shops. Packaging is usually a plastic bag filled with a white granular powder. The products are known as "Red Dove," "Blue Silk," "Zoom," "Bloom," "Cloud 9," "Ocean Snow," "Lunar Wave," "Vanilla Sky," "Ivory Wave," "White Lightning," "Scarface" and "Hurricane Charlie." They produce increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, agitation, hallucinations, extreme paranoia and delusions. Poison centers took 303 calls about the products in 2010; between January 1 and Sept. 30, 2011, the number of calls had jumped to 5,226.

Many states have responded to the rising use of bath salts by passing laws to make them illegal, and in September 2011, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration issued a ban of the chemicals used to make these dangerous drugs.

The **Texas Poison Center Network** wants you to be aware of the dangers of these products. Here are a few tips on what they are and the dangers surrounding them:

- Parents of teens should be on the lookout for such products in their children's bedrooms and backpacks. Be particularly skeptical of products labeled "incense" or "bath salts."
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of drug use in loved ones: paranoia, changes in personality, agitation and anxiety are among the symptoms reported by users of these substances.
- Talk with family members about the dangers of these products. Don't be fooled by the ready availability and legal status of new "designer drugs." These products are not a "safe" or harmless alternative to other illicit drugs of abuse. Many can cause hallucinations and agitation that poison center experts say represent the opposite of a "mellow high." In the case of bath salts, for example, poison center officials report instances of severe paranoia that has caused users to harm themselves and others.
- Keep the Poison Help number near your phone: **1-800-222-1222**. You can call your poison center to ask about these substances even if you have not been exposed to them.