ACT Government Health

Prohibition of Synthetic Cannabinoids (Synthetic Cannabis)

On the 6 July 2011, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) announced that it had taken measures to list a range of synthetic cannabinoids (synthetic cannabis) as prohibited substances under Commonwealth law, effective 8 July 2011.

The ACT has automatically adopted these changes under local medicines laws. From 8 July 2011 it will be illegal to manufacture, obtain, possess, supply, sell and/or use products containing synthetic cannabis in the ACT.

The ACT Government has granted an amnesty period until 1 August 2011 for these synthetic cannabis products. This means that from the 8 July 2011 until 1 August 2011 people will not be prosecuted for offences relating to these products.

What is synthetic cannabis?

Synthetic cannabis includes a range of synthetic compounds that mimic the effects of the active component in cannabis, delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

Synthetic cannabis can be found in products with brand names such as Kronic, Northern Lights, Kaos, Spice, Mango and Voodoo. These products usually consist of dried herbs that are sprayed with synthetic cannabis, which are then smoked for their cannabis-like effects.

Synthetic cannabis, like natural cannabis, can cause memory and thinking impairment in small doses. Heavy and regular use may cause:

- Hallucinations
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Problems with memory
- Paranoia
- Psychosis
- Heart palpitations.

There is little known about the long-term health effects from continued use of synthetic cannabis. However, there have been some reports of users experiencing addiction and withdrawal symptoms associated with these products. Overdoses and deaths have also occurred however it is not yet proven that these were due to synthetic cannabis.

INFORMATION

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These products were previously legally available as herbal smoking mixtures from speciality stores. However, they are not subject to rigorous standards for production or safety and usually do not include a full list of the chemical ingredients they contain. The type, quality and quantity of chemicals that these products contain is therefore unknown and pose a health risk to consumers.

Users should not assume that the products are less potent than cannabis. Additionally, users should not assume that they will get the same effect from the same product each time they use it.

What do I do following the ban?

Retailers and consumers in possession of synthetic cannabis are advised not to sell or use these products in light of the ban and the potential health risk associated with their use

An amnesty is in place until 1 August 2011, during which time retailers and consumers in possession of known or suspected synthetic cannabis products may anonymously hand these in at their local ACT Police station for safe disposal, without fear of prosecution.

After the amnesty, penalties of up to 5 years in prison and/or fines of up to $55,000 for persons and $275,000 for businesses may apply for breaches of the ban.

Local contact points

Further information regarding the ban can be obtained by contacting 02 6205 1700 between 9:30am and 4:30pm Monday to Friday.

For further information about health issues associated with cannabis, please contact your doctor or the ACT Health Directorate; Mental Health, Justice Health and Alcohol and Drug Services Division 24-Hour Helpline on 02 6207 9977.