

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

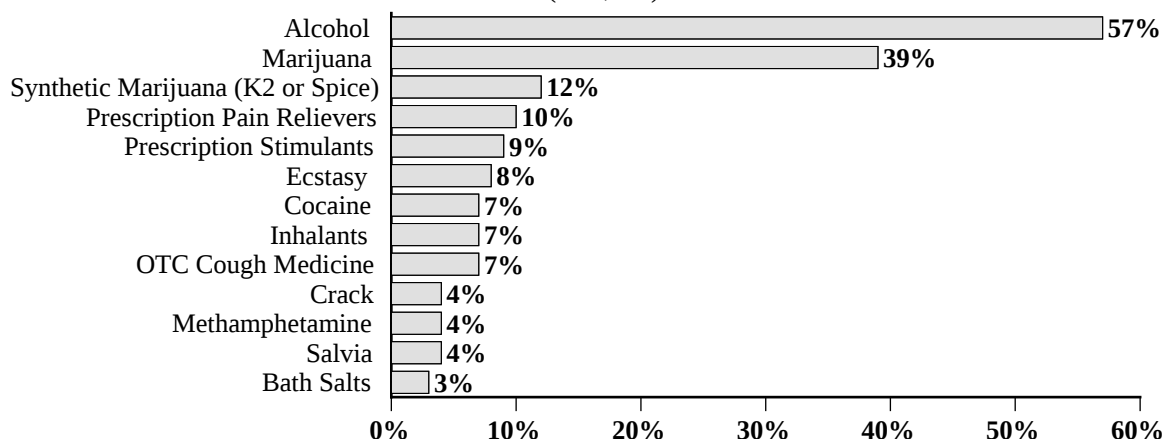
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Synthetic Marijuana Third Most Reported Substance Used by U.S. High School Students

More high school students report using synthetic marijuana than any other substance besides alcohol and marijuana, according to data from a recently released survey of 9th to 12th graders. Alcohol and marijuana were the most prevalent drug used, with 57% reporting alcohol use and 39% reporting marijuana use in the past year in 2012. The third most prevalent substance used was synthetic marijuana (12%), often referred to as K2 or Spice. Use of all other substances was reported by 10% or less of high school students. Similar results have been found by other surveys of high school students (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 21, Issue 5).

*Editor's Note: Synthetic marijuana products typically consist of plant material treated with synthetic cannabinoids, psychoactive substances designed to bind to and stimulate the same receptors in the brain as THC. Synthetic marijuana use in general has been linked with adverse effects such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, anxiety, agitation, and acute kidney injury (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 20, Issue 17 and Volume 22, Issue 7). However, there are more than 140 different types¹ of synthetic cannabinoids, each with potentially different potency as well as adverse effects². The exact synthetic cannabinoids contained in synthetic marijuana products is impossible to determine without specific testing—studies have shown that the types and amounts of synthetic cannabinoids can vary greatly between products, lots, and even within the same package³. In reality, youth who report using synthetic marijuana likely have no idea what specific synthetic cannabinoid they are using or what the effects will be.*

Percentage of U.S. Students (Grades 9 to 12) Reporting Past Year Alcohol and Other Drug Use, 2012 (N=3,884)



¹Hudson S, Ramsey J, "The Emergency and Analysis of Synthetic Cannabinoids," *Drug Testing and Analysis* 3(7-8):466-478, 2011.

²United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Synthetic Cannabinoids in Herbal Products*, 2011. ³Hillebrand, J, et al., "Legal Highs on the Internet," *Substance Use and Misuse*, 45(3): 330-340, 2010.

NOTES: Abuse of inhalants and OTC cough medicine is defined as use to get high. Abuse of prescription drugs is defined as use without a doctor's prescription. Surveys were conducted in schools by GfK Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications with 3,884 9th to 12th grade students from February to June 2012.. The margin of error is +/- 2.1 percentage points.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from The Partnership for a Drug-Free America and the MetLife Foundation, *The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS): Teens and Parents*, 2013. Available online at <http://www.drugfree.org/newsroom/research-publication/full-report-and-key-findings-the-2012-partnership-attitude-tracking-study-sponsored-by-metlife-foundation>.