

## What is Spice?

Spice, or synthetic marijuana as it is sometimes known, refers to a variety of herbal mixtures that contain dried, shredded plant material and chemical additives that are meant to produce mind-altering effects. It is often marketed as a “safe”, legal alternative to Marijuana because it contains some synthetic compounds found in Marijuana. For several years, spice mixtures have been easy to purchase at smoke shops, gas stations, and through the Internet. It is often sold as incense that resembles potpourri and labeled “not for human consumption.” Spice is sold under many names, including K2, King Kong, Yucatan Fire, Skunk, Moon Rocks, and others. The United States Drug Enforcement Administration has attempted to limit the sale of spice by banning the most common active chemicals found in the drug; however, manufacturers of spice evade these restrictions by substituting different chemicals into their mixtures, resulting in an ever-changing chemical composition of the drug and unpredictable effects for users.



## How Spice is Used and its Effects

Spice is primarily abused by smoking. Spice users often report experiences of elevated mood, relaxation, and altered perception. Some users also report psychotic effects like extreme anxiety, paranoia and hallucinations. Other commonly reported effects can include rapid heart rate, high blood pressure, vomiting, agitation, confusion, and hallucinations. Because the chemical composition of spice can differ greatly from product to product, the effects of the drug are often unpredictable. Currently, the effects of long-term spice use on human health is unknown.

## Spice Use in Pima County

People in Pima County and the United States have been using spice for a number of years. However, little is known about who uses spice, how many people use it, or how often it causes severe adverse reactions. In April 2015, the City of Tucson and the City of South Tucson Police and Fire Departments began reporting a substantial increase in the number of spice-related incidents they were handling. To gain a better understanding of spice use in our community and the risk posed to public health, the Pima County Health Department collected and analyzed spice-related incident data from these agencies between April and August 2015. The following highlight key findings from those data.

*(PLEASE NOTE: The data in this section is not intended to characterize the broader scope of spice use in Pima County. The data only provide information about spice-related emergency first responses made by select first responder agencies in Pima County over a 5-month period.)*

### Pima County Spice-Related First Responder Incidents

From April to August of 2015, the City of Tucson and the City of South Tucson Police and Fire Departments responded to a combined 675 spice-related incidents. On average, these agencies responded to approximately 135 spice-related

*Number of Responses to Spice-Related Incidents by First Responder Agency  
Pima County (April – August 2015)*



