

# Synthetic ‘Pot’ Kills 1, Causes Severe Bleeding in 38



By *Jamie Wells, M.D.* — April 1, 2018



Credit: Wikimedia Commons [1]

In a rapid series of progressively escalating press releases by the [Illinois Department of Public Health](#) [2], it appears that a dangerous synthetic cannabinoid product called K2, spice, synthetic marijuana, legal weed or fake weed has now claimed its latest victim in an outbreak currently totaling 38 people whose severe bleeding is linked to exposure of this substance. The state division just announced the first death in this cluster. Over recent days, the toll of those harmed continues to increase with all being hospitalized for spontaneous excessive bleeding, including but not limited to coughing up blood, urinating blood, bloody stools, bleeding from the eyes, ears, nose and gums.

[Illinois government officials warn](#) [3] that these items were sold by convenience stores and dealers or obtained from friends. They have issued this advisory:

*“If you have purchased any of this product in the past month, do not use it. If you have used any of these products, and start experiencing severe, unexplained bleeding or bruising, please have someone take you to the hospital immediately or call 911. Do not walk or drive yourself. Tell your health care providers about the possible link between your symptoms and synthetic cannabinoid use.”*

## What are synthetic cannabinoids?

[The agency](#) [3] goes on to inform about the varying misperceptions people have with respect to synthetic cannabinoids and their falsely perceived safety. As per [their description](#) [3], they are human-made, unregulated mind-altering chemicals that fall under a drug category called new

psychoactive substances (NPS). These substances are sprayed on dried plant material for smoking or sold in liquid form to be used in vaporizing devices.

They are sold and used recreationally under many names (e.g. herbal or liquid incense, K2, Spice, Black Mamba, Bombay Blue, Genie, Zohai, among others). Often pitched as being able to mimic the effects of cannabis because the chemical makeup is similar to those in the marijuana plant, the marketing of synthetic cannabinoids as synthetic “pot” can be deceptive and untrue. [Synthetic cannabinoids](#) [4] have been found to impact the brain with greater potency, be volatile and life-threatening.

### **What is causing the internal bleeding (and now death) in Illinois?**

According to the [Chicago Tribune](#) [5],

*“Consumption of synthetic cannabinoids previously has caused serious health problems such as seizures and kidney failure, but the side effect of severe bleeding is tied to the recent outbreak, said Dr. Patrick Lank, a medical toxicologist who works at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.” The article goes on to reveal “three of the hospitalized people tested positive for brodifacoum, more commonly known as rat poison.”*

You may be familiar with the drug coumadin - a blood thinning medication used to treat clots and prevent stroke - whose generic name is warfarin. [Brodifacoum](#) [6] is often called a “superwarfarin” because it is extremely powerful with a long duration of action.

Rat poison notoriously contains ingredients that have anticoagulant properties - or substances that impede someone’s ability to clot effectively. This particular compound antagonizes Vitamin K (which is necessary for proper clotting) and has an especially long half-life, so treatment for poisonings requires high doses at regular, continuous intervals for protracted periods of time. Over-the-counter options are not good enough given the severity of the problem and the urgency needed to correct it. And, therapies are mostly helpful when initiated before extensive bleeding and blood loss takes place.

Once someone loses their ability to clot a cascade of untoward events follows. With such internal bleeding and blood loss, a person can go into shock, suffer a stroke, cardiac events, loss of consciousness and death.

### **The bottom line...**

Efforts to liken synthetic cannabinoids to the active ingredient in marijuana by calling the products synthetic “pot” or “marijuana” are misleading misnomers. These “products” contain many highly potent, dangerous chemicals and you are taking big risks when using them.

### **ADDENDUM (4/2/18, 8pm)**

The Illinois Department of Public Health now reports 2 deaths, 56 cases and expects these

numbers to rise. See their link [here](#) [3] for daily updates on this outbreak.

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**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/04/01/synthetic-%E2%80%98pot%E2%80%99-kills-1-causes-severe-bleeding-38-12781>

**Links**

[1] [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/39/Hazard\\_T.svg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/39/Hazard_T.svg)

[2] <http://www.wndu.com/content/news/State-health-department-links-death-to-synthetic-marijuana-478492973.html>

[3] <http://dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/prevention-wellness/medical-cannabis/synthetic-cannabinoids>

[4] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/01/21/drug-85-times-more-potent-thc-caused-zombie-outbreak-new-york-city-10754>

[5] <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-met-synthetic-pot-outbreak-death-20180401-story.html>

[6] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brodifacoum>