

# Black Mamba/Spice

Black Mamba is not a drug itself but rather a brand name printed on packets of 'herbal' smoking mixture, which contain synthetic cannabinoids.

## Background

- Spice and Black Mamba, have become generic nicknames for Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists (SCRAs) in the UK.
- There are currently over four hundred identified powders or crystals identified as SCRAs.
- These are not natural substances, they are synthesised in laboratories. They are usually dissolved in solvent solution and sprayed onto an innocuous herb or leaf material to give them an appearance similar to cannabis.
- There is no quality control and they are not been tested for suitability for human consumption.

**Synthetic Cannabinoids** are man-made chemicals that have been developed to mimic the effects of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive chemical in Cannabis. They are frequently referred to as 'legal highs' but are actually controlled as Class B drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (MDA).

In their pure form **Synthetic Cannabinoid** are either solids, liquids or oils which are then 'added to dried herbs, vegetable matter or plant cuttings to make a smoking mixture' that often looks similar to real cannabis or can be used to impregnate paper or similar for onward supply, such as into prisons.

Synthetic Cannabinoids can be up to 100 times more potent than natural Cannabis, with the Global Drug Survey (2016) finding users were 30 times more likely to seek emergency medical treatment because of Synthetic Cannabis use than Cannabis and Skunk.

## The law

The Psychoactive Substances Act (PSA) 2016 made it an offence to produce, supply, offer to supply, possess with intent to supply, import or export SCRAs.

The PSA does not create an offence of possession (except in custodial institutions).

Since December 2016, the overwhelming number of SCRAs have been controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 as Class B controlled drugs.

The effects include:

- The effects are wide ranging, unpredictable and can last for several hours. They include:
  - dizziness,
  - vomiting,
  - collapsing into a comatose state, and
  - Increased heart rate leading cardiac arrest/death

Other effects include Sweating, Inability to speak clearly, Aggression, Restlessness, Seizures, kidney failure, Hallucinations, Tics, Paranoia, Mood Swings, Prolonged headaches, Nose bleeds and long term use can result in physical addiction and withdrawal symptoms

- Violence is often a symptom of use and can be extreme with reports of serious self-harming and suicidal thoughts which can remain long after the initial effects have worn off.
- Many substances have been found to be very addictive and, because they are relatively new, finding effective treatments can be problematic.
- Use in a local area can effect various aspects of the local community.
- There are two distinct sections of society who are vulnerable to these substances:
  - the 'rough sleepers' or 'street populations' within town and city centres
  - some sections of the prison population

