Good afternoon and thanks for joining as I’m Judy Simpson. The Northern New England poison center is warning about the dangers of relatively new designer drugs. Poison centers across the country are reporting a growing number of calls due to the synthetic stimulants. To find out more including tips for parents on dealing with the drug use we called on Gail Finkelstein. Gail is a poison prevention educator with the Northern New England poison center at Fletcher Allen health care. I still have you with us and boy this is just frightening information.

Gayle.: It is very frightening. Let me start by talking to you about bath salts. Bath salts are not your traditional cosmetic bath salts that you would use to bathe in and clean. These are bath salts that have psychoactive stimulants in them. They come under the brand name ivory wave vanilla sky white lightning Bolivian bath cloud nine. These are some of the names you might find. It’s a white to tan powder which is spiked with the psychoactive stimulant. They’re packaged not for human consumption. Possible side effects are very dangerous it could be increase in blood pressure increase in body of a picture increase in heart rate. We’re seeing hallucinations extreme paranoia. It can lead to very scary behavior. Seizures are possible and even possibly death. So it’s very important when you come into a situation and assess a patient. Sometimes you might not see an increase in blood pressure or heart rate but you have to assess their thought process to see if they’re in control of their thought process. Like I said it’s a very dangerous situation. You can add muscle break down due to high temperature renal failure kidney failure. It’s something that’s very dangerous and it’s high on our radar right now. It’s occurring across the country which started to see it in the last several months. We’ve seen it increase in calls to poison center and the poison center is serving three states. Vermont New Hampshire and Maine. Maine has seen a fair number of calls especially in the last six months and even more so this summer and now Vermont we’re starting to see a few calls coming in. Primarily from Health Care professionals who come in and call in to ask us how to treat the patient because a lot of times these patients have to be heavily sedated and it’s hard to get them stated so they will call us for advice on. Sometimes we have to have them be put into a medical coma to get their blood pressure down and there are recount.

Judy.: Let’s back up for just a step. These are packets they look like little packets of bath salt.

Gayle: they look like bath salts and they’re sold or they were originally in convenience stores head shops and you can get them online Amazon .Com and only until recently has there been a temporary law put in place to prevent this from happening in the state.
Judy.: Some people take this drug and some of the reports we've heard from police and what have you heard as far as people's behavior while they're ingesting this stuff?

Gayle.: It can be very scary they can become very agitated like I said they can have hallucinations delusions they can be extremely paranoid. They can go into psychotic episodes that can last for days and sometimes they can be agitated with no violence and sometimes it can be extremely violent so it's very difficult sometimes when a police officer comes upon a scene and someone has been abusing bath salts. They can become very combative they can be harmful to themselves or to other people. They could have knives they can go after the police officer or anyone else in contact with them. Very bizarre behaviors that we've been seeing and have been reported across the country.

Judy.: And there are some really long-term effects too?

Gayle.: Unfortunately right now we don't know there hasn't been a lot of research out there because the chemical components of these products are unknown in a lot of instances so we don't know that the true long-term effects of the product would be and even some of the short term effects because like I said it's relatively new to the drug scene.

Judy.: How prevalent are bath salts in the state? You've said you've gotten a few calls that don't necessarily represent how many incidents there have been.

Gayle.: I think since the spring about six calls to the poison center and like I said primarily most of these calls are coming from Health Care professionals asking for advice on how to treat the patient that that's not a true representation of what is actually occurring in Vermont because were only seeing the calls like it said from Health Care professionals or possibly law enforcement calling us for questions but a lot of emergency departments are seeing patients coming in who are abusing bath salts and even people who the cassette law enforcement are seeing them as well. Like I said I think it's a lot more prevalent than what we're seeing at the poison center. Maine has seen a lot more calls than we have and so has New Hampshire and I think it's only been increase unless more action is taken into effect and like I said there has been a temporary ban. The governor placed a temporary ban on bath salts starting August 3. That goes into effect and lasts until December with the hope the state will implement a more permanent ban on the product. So up until August 3 you could go into a convenience store and buy this product and now there's a fine I believe its $5000 and or two years two days imprisonment so it is a felony to either purchase or be in possession of this product.

Judy.: Is it addictive?

Gayle.: We don't know for sure because like I said the chemical components or a lot of them are unknown but it's possible it could be very addictive.

Judy.: About a year ago there were national reports of about a synthetic marijuana. What types of calls how does the poison center get about this?
Gayle.: Synthetic marijuana has been out longer than bath salts so we know a little bit more about synthetic marijuana. This is a product that is a dried plant that is sprayed with a chemical. It has different products in it and basically people are using this thinking it's a safer alternative to other illegal ways to get high. Again it can be very dangerous is packaged as incense or potpourri other brand names are spice or spice gold to name a few. Its effects are very similar to marijuana. These chemicals are binding to the same receptor sites that THC which is inactive psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. Sometimes it has a higher affinity to these receptor sites and can cause some issues. The side effects again you might see different side effects increased heart rate increased blood pressure anxiety agitation you may even see hallucinations with this product but again the long-term side effects are unknown because a lot of the chemical components are unknown and haven't been researched.

Judy.: Is this something that's pretty prevalent in Vermont?

Gayle.: Synthetic marijuana? Again we see it it's not as high as some other states Maine and New Hampshire have seen much more than we have but it's out there. Began the calls we get are typically from Health Care professionals or law enforcement so again what we see is not probably a true representation of what is really in the state. But it's something against the on the lookout.

Judy.: Are there laws regarding synthetic marijuana?

Gayle.: There are there was a state ban a temporary ban on synthetic marijuana for five Cannabinoids that make up this chemical structure and there's also a Federal ban on it as well. Again we're hoping that a permanent ban will be put into place with synthetic marijuana as well.

Judy.: Your slide noted some possible side effects short term and long-term effects? You said long-term you don't really know.

Gayle.: Right it's hard to tell because the chemical components of these products are always changing. So we may outlaw one product make it illegal to purchase and then these companies are adding another chemical component to it and creating another product so it's going to take a lot of time and a lot of research and probably a lot of money to really figure out what's in these products to begin with. Since there's been very little research done it's hard to tell what the true long-term effects will be.

Judy.: Not only that but if someone has tried this product and hasn't had a problem with it in the past tries it again and something has changed in the makeup which is completely possible that's a very dangerous situation.

Gayle.: It is a very dangerous situation. That's why it's very important that you know what's out there do your research and you talk to your kids and you talk to the parents and to really increase awareness that these things are going on in the state.

Judy.: Let's talk about some prevention tips what can parents do what can grandparents to if they suspect or just one more information and need information on what to look for?
Gayle.: I think it's very important that they know about the poison center and know they can call is not for just exposures but for questions like you said. There's a lot in the media there's a lot on the Internet they can go to but to call the poison center to get the most up to date reliable information is really important. The number to call is 1-(800)-222-1222 and if they actually go out onto our web site which is nnpec.org they can actually view a webinar on bath salts to learn a little bit more about the product. Again it's a free webinar they just go online and click on the webinar. Education is key to really know what's going on there to really look into your child's backpack in their bedrooms and have a question if they see a product labeled bath salts or incense or potpourri what is it and question your child and talk to them about the dangers of drug abuse and the danger of these products and to tell them that we really don't know what the chemical components are and the short and long-term side effects are really unknown in a lot of instances. So it's very important and also be on the lookout for signs and symptoms of drug abuse and general. Obviously all the signs and symptoms may not suggest drug abuse but they could be an indicator. These are changing behavior of a child drop of great performance change of friends change of physical appearance are all things to look out for if you suspect that your child may be abusing a substance.

Judy.: Again you said you could also call the poison center.

Gayle.: And you can call the poison center. We can give you the side effects and what to look for in a child if you suspect they are abusing.

Judy.: Overall the poison center responds to a lot of different kinds of calls. Can you give me some examples of some of the other issues that you deal with at the center with some of the other calls that you get?

Gayle.: We get calls from all across the board from little kids calling in or mothers calling about their little kids getting into something underneath the medicine cabinet which is typical. Prescription drug abuse and over the counter medication abuse is another big topic that we get a lot of calls about. People calling in to ask questions about their medications side effects of their medication. Carbon monoxide poisoning we get calls about so pretty much any poisoning you can think of we do get calls about. Prescription drugs are big and inhalant abuse is another big issue that we get calls about. Lately the bath salts like a mentioned and synthetic marijuana are pretty new so we're seeing an increase in calls. Not just in our center but across the country at poison centers.

Judy.: Let's go over again some of the issues the bath salts as far as what they look like what to have a heads up on and some of the things they can do to your body?

Gayle.: They're packaged not for human consumption. Their little packages and are looking for something that's like a white to tan powder and like I said it spiked with a psychoactive stimulant. So it's very similar to amphetamine. People are abusing these to get the same type of the fact that they might get with amphetamines or methamphetamines cocaine or even ecstasy. Like I said I could lead to very dangerous side effects. Psychoactive paranoia which can be very extreme psychotic episodes. It can last hours to several days or even up to a week. Sometimes patients are admitted to an emergency department just run an evaluation and then let go but sometimes they may have to go to the icu and spend several days there then maybe sometimes they have to be transferred to a
psychiatric facility. It really depends on the patient and how much they've been abusing these materials. Again very dangerous. I had mentioned that it can cause severe high temperature which can cause muscle breakdown and can lead to renal failure and kidney failure so it's something you do not want to take lightly.

Judy.: If you suspect that a friend or child is abusing the substance taken to see a healthcare professional obviously?

Gayle.: Sure I would have them to either to your Dr. or an emergency department and have them looked that because it can lead to very violent behavior. It's hard to tell every person acts differently but they can become very agitated and they can have mood swings have very jerky behavior and they can become very violent. They can be violence and harm themselves and like I said harm other people. So it's something you need to be really careful with.

Judy.: Once again as you said it's always the makeup of these things are changing so you don't really know what you're going to get.

Gayle.: It's hard it's very hard to tell what's in these products and like I said you can put a lot on certain products but a couple months down the road you might have a new chemical component in these products and people are going after that as well. It's really hard to keep up with what see exactly in these products and like I said what the long-term side effects will be if someone abuses these for a long period of time.

Judy.: When they were for sale what easily sell for what were they retailing for?

Gayle.: It could be anywhere from 20 to 60 dollars depending on where they're buying it and how much they're buying.

Judy.: About how much is in an envelope?

Gayle.: I think they come in several different sizes like 250 mg up to 500 mg sizes so depending on the strength in the amount.

Judy.: That's talk about synthetic marijuana too similar side effects?

Gayle.: Yes you can get increased heart rate you're not going to probably have the tendency of the psychotic episodes or extreme paranoia but you could see hallucinations. It does lead to increased heart rate and increased blood pressure anxiety agitation. A lot of times if they are admitted into an emergency department they have supportive care and then let go. The side effects are not as dangerous as what you're seeing with bath salts because bath salts can lead to the extreme scary psychotic episodes but again is dangerous and is something you really need to be looking out for. Again the calls that we're getting at the poison center are coming from pretty much of law enforcement for Health Care professionals asking for advice.
Judy.: As far as incidents in the state you said you have gotten several calls but that doesn't reflect how prevalent this has been?

Gayle.: It doesn't because like I said we're getting calls from the Health Care professionals asking for advice on how to treat a patient because a lot of times these patients have to be heavily sedated so if someone comes in on bath salts and they can manage them we won't get that call. If the law enforcement picks up a person who's been abusing bath salts and they can manage that patient and get them to the emergency department we won't get that call. It could be much higher in the state than what we're seeing. I know that there are urgency departments across the state that have seen patients coming in who are abusing bath salts and I think it's only going to continue.

Judy.: Can you once again give us the number for the poison center?

Gayle.: Sure the number for the poison center is 1800 222 1222 it's open 24 hours a day seven days a week it's free confidential. The website is nnepc.org. I really encourage people to use us it's a great resource. We are staffed with Physicians and nurses and we can give you the most reliable up to date information on all these products. A lot of stuff is out there and start doing searches on the web but one call to the poison center and you can get the information right away and feel comfortable.

Judy.: It's important information to get out that's for sure.

Gayle.: It is important and again awareness and knowing what's out there I think is very important. Talk to children and talk to their friends and let them know the dangers of these products and let them know what's out there and effects that could possibly occur and to keep an eye out for them.

Judy.: Thanks for joining us.

Gayle.: Thank you very much.

Judy.: That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on across the fence.

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