

## SYNTHETIC DRUGS

### DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Today we will be talking about synthetic drugs.

The **ground rules** for this discussion are:

- (1) No personal attacks on anyone's opinions
- (2) Allow each participant to express themselves
- (3) Make head calls at your leisure, just don't interrupt the group
- (4) Keep your language clean as not to offend others
- (5) PARTICIPATION BY ALL!!!!!!

#### **Gain Attention**

Cpl Thornton is a model Marine. She is responsible, reliable and is always there for her Marines. You know Cpl Thornton through some mutual friends and always found her to be funny and above board. One evening at a mutual friend's cookout you engage Cpl Thornton in a conversation. It becomes obvious that you have a lot in common and you are really enjoying her company. One of your other buddies, Cpl Reed, joins the conversation and offers you a beer and some "Spice." You decline at first but then decide, even though Spice is banned in the Marine Corps, why not? Thornton expresses disinterest and leaves. You and Cpl Reed begin talking and smoking. A few minutes after smoking you begin to feel funny, like you are having a panic attack. Your vision starts changing and you cannot understand what is going on around you. You feel paralyzed and can't get up. You can hear people laughing around you but they all look blurry. Cpl Reed asks if you are ok but you can't respond. Cpl Reed then laughs loudly, referring to your inability to speak as being "high." You begin having the most awful thoughts. Still unable to communicate you feel Cpl Thornton wiping your head with a cold cloth and calling 911. All you can think is "what is happening to me?"

"Spice," "Cloud Nine," "Molly," "Chalk," "Special K." These terms may sound innocent, but they are street names for dangerous synthetic drugs. Over the past several years, there has been a rapid increase in the abuse of these substances. They can be readily purchased in retail outlets and over the Internet. They are manufactured with no government oversight. It is an unregulated and unlicensed industry. They have harmful effects and are potentially deadly. The Marine Corps has a zero tolerance policy for synthetic drug use. It is crucial for you to understand what they are and the dangers of using them.

**Key points** for the discussion today will be:

- (1) Defining synthetic drugs
- (2) Explaining USMC policy on synthetic drugs
- (3) Identifying common synthetic drugs
- (4) Describing the physical and mental consequences of using synthetic drugs

**Learning Objective:** After this guided discussion, you will have a better understanding of common synthetic drugs and their effects.

### **DISCUSSION**

We will begin by defining synthetic drugs and reviewing the Marine Corps policy on these substances.

#### **KEY POINT 1**

1. Synthetic drugs are produced to mimic the effects of controlled substances. They are laced with, or entirely composed of, chemicals produced in clandestine laboratories. They do not primarily originate from plants; they are man-made.
2. The Marine Corps strictly bans the manufacture, distribution, possession, use, or trafficking of synthetic drugs. There is zero tolerance for them. Violators will be dealt with according to the Uniform Code of Military Justice and/or adverse administrative action. Use of synthetic drugs can lead to serious consequences, including discharge from the Marine Corps.

**Interim Summary:** Now that you understand the general definition of synthetic drugs, we will take a look at some specific kinds and their harmful effects. All of them are strictly prohibited by the Marine Corps.

#### **KEY POINT 2**

1. "Spice" is a synthetic cannabinoid mixture of herbs and spices that is typically sprayed with a chemical similar to one of the ingredients in marijuana. Also known as "K2" or "synthetic marijuana," it is usually smoked.
2. "Spice" produces psychological effects similar to those of marijuana: elevated mood, relaxation, and altered perception. But there can be psychotic effects like extreme anxiety, agitation, confusion, paranoia, panic attacks, lowering of inhibitions, and hallucinations.
3. Physical effects include conjunctivitis, fever, increased heart rate, higher blood pressure, reduced blood supply to the heart, and loss of consciousness. In a few cases, "Spice" has been associated with heart attacks. Regular users may experience withdrawal and addiction symptoms.
4. There are a number of concerns about it. It appears to be stored in the body for long periods of time, making the long-term effects unknown. Also, it may contain harmful heavy metal residues.

#### **KEY POINT 3**

1. "Bath salts" or synthetic cathinones are very different from what you put into a bath. Usually sniffed or snorted in powder form, they contain man-made chemicals related to amphetamines. They are sold with street names such as "Ivory Wave," "Bloom," "Cloud Nine," "Lunar Wave," "Vanilla Sky," and "White Lightning."
2. Users experience agitation, insomnia, irritability, dizziness, memory loss, depression, paranoia, delusions, suicidal thoughts, seizures, and panic attacks. There are also reported effects of impaired perception of reality, reduced motor control, and decreased ability to think clearly.
3. Because "bath salts" act as a stimulant, physical effects include rapid heart rate, chest pains, nosebleeds, sweating, nausea, and vomiting. Early indications are that they have a high abuse and addiction potential.
4. The long-term effects of "bath salts" are unknown because they are a relatively new drug.

Quite obviously, using "Spice" or "bath salts" results in serious effects on both the body and mind. You risk significant harm to yourself and others if you abuse these substances. Now, let's examine a different group of synthetic drugs known as "club drugs" with equally serious consequences.

#### **KEY POINT 4**

1. "Club drugs" are drugs that tend to be abused by teens and young adults at bars, nightclubs, concerts, and parties. They include, but are not limited to, ecstasy, methamphetamine, Rohypnol®, GHB, and ketamine. We will look at each of them.
2. Ecstasy, also known as "Molly," acts as both a stimulant and a psychedelic.
  - a) It causes changes in perception, including euphoria and increased sensitivity to touch, energy, and sensual and sexual arousal; increased need to be touched; and increased need for stimulation. The psychological effects are confusion, anxiety, depression, paranoia, sleep problems, and drug craving.
  - b) Ecstasy can have many of the same physical effects as other stimulants like cocaine and amphetamines, such as increases in heart rate and blood pressure. Users may experience other symptoms such as muscle tension, tremors, involuntary teeth clenching, nausea, blurred vision, faintness, and chills or sweating.
  - c) In high doses, ecstasy can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature, resulting in a sharp increase in body temperature, which can result in liver, kidney, or cardiovascular system failure or even death. Ecstasy can interfere with its own metabolism (breakdown within the body), causing potentially harmful levels to build up in the body if it is taken repeatedly within short periods of time.
  - d) Some heavy users experience long-lasting confusion, depression, sleep abnormalities, and problems with attention and memory. Because ecstasy promotes feelings of closeness and sexual arousal, its use can lead to unsafe sex as well.
3. Similar to cocaine, methamphetamine (meth) is a highly addictive stimulant. Common street names for it are "Speed," "Ice," "Chalk," "Crank," and "Glass."
  - a) Chronic meth abusers exhibit violent behavior, anxiety, confusion, and insomnia. They also experience psychotic effects: paranoia, aggression, visual and auditory hallucinations, mood disturbances, and delusions, such as the sensation of insects creeping on or under the skin. Such paranoia can result in homicidal or suicidal thoughts.
  - b) Taking even small amounts of meth can result in increased wakefulness, increased physical activity, decreased appetite, rapid breathing and heart rate, irregular heartbeat, increased blood pressure, and overheating. Meth abuse may also cause extreme anorexia, memory loss, and severe dental problems. High doses can elevate body temperature to dangerous levels and cause stroke, heart attack, and even death.
4. Rohypnol®, also known as "roofies" or "ruffies," acts as a depressant. Available in odorless, colorless, and tasteless forms, the drug has been used to commit sexual assaults. Rohypnol® tablets are usually placed in the alcoholic drink of an unsuspecting victim to incapacitate and sedate them and prevent resistance. The drug leaves the victim unaware of what has happened to them.
  - a) Rohypnol® produces drowsiness, sleep, decreased anxiety, and amnesia. It can also cause increased or decreased reaction time, impaired mental functioning and judgment, confusion, aggression, and excitability.
  - b) Physical effects include muscle relaxation, slurred speech, loss of motor coordination, weakness, headache, and slowed breathing. Rohypnol® may be lethal when combined with depressants such as alcohol and heroin.
5. GHB is a depressant. Common street names for it are "G," "Georgia Home Boy," "Liquid X," and "Liquid Ecstasy." Because it shares properties similar to those of Rohypnol®, it has also been used as a date rape drug.
  - a) Users experience euphoria, drowsiness, decreased anxiety, confusion, and memory impairment. GHB can also produce visual hallucinations and excited and aggressive behavior.

- b) While low doses of GHB produce nausea, high doses can result in unconsciousness, seizures, slowed heart rate, greatly slowed breathing, lower body temperature, vomiting, nausea, coma, and even death.
- 6. Ketamine and Methoxetamine (MXE) – sold as a Ketamine derivative - are anesthetics, mostly used in veterinary practices. Also known as “Special K,” “Vitamin K,” “Cat Valium,” and “Cat Tranquilizer,” it has been used as a date rape drug too.
  - a) They produce hallucinations. It distorts perceptions of sight and sound and makes the user feel disconnected and not in control. Low doses impair attention, learning ability, and memory. At higher doses, ketamine can result in delirium, amnesia and unconsciousness.
  - b) The drugs cause physical effects such as an increase in heart rate and blood pressure that gradually decreases. Users can become unresponsive, experience involuntarily rapid eye movement and nausea, dilated pupils, salivation, tear secretions, and stiffening of the muscles.
- 7. 25I NBOMe & 25C NBOMe are psychedelic drugs/hallucinogens, abused orally. Administered on blotter paper and in dropper bottles. These are also referred to as “N-bomb” or “Smiles” and have been linked to recent deaths.

There are many kinds of synthetic drugs. We just finished examining “Spice,” “bath salts,” and common “club drugs.” Although they may differ in terms of what they look like and what they are made of, they share one important thing in common: they produce extremely powerful, damaging physical and mental effects. Let’s go through a quick exercise now in which you name the drug that causes the consequences I describe.

### **KEY POINT 5**

- 1. Violent behavior, paranoia, delusions of insects crawling underneath skin, increased wakefulness, decreased appetite, severe dental problems. What drug produces these effects?  
Methamphetamine
- 2. Effects similar to marijuana, elevated mood, relaxation, increased heart rate, higher blood pressure. These are effects of what drug?  
“Spice”
- 3. Euphoria, increased sensitivity to touch, increased sexual arousal, increased heart rate, tremors, chills or sweating. And these signs/ symptoms?  
Ecstasy
- 4. Agitation, insomnia, irritability, suicidal thoughts, chest pains, nosebleeds. What drug produces these effects?  
“Bath salts”
- 5. Drowsiness, decreased anxiety, memory impairment, used for date rapes. How about these signs/symptoms?  
Rohypnol®, GHB, or Ketamine

We just finished reviewing the consequences of synthetic drugs. These consequences and others should never be ignored.

### **SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

There is no easy “high” or “rush” that comes from using synthetic drugs. Today we learned that these substances produce a broad array of disturbing mental effects: impaired judgment and thinking, violent behavior, suicidal thinking, amnesia, paranoia, and hallucinations to name just a few. Physical effects range from nausea and vomiting to rapid heart rate to tremors to loss of consciousness. There is even the real risk of death. Simply put, synthetic drugs are dangerous. Use what you have learned

today to make the decision not to use them. If you see another Marine using these synthetic drugs, notify your chain of command and get the user to the hospital. Understand that getting or giving help is aligned with our Core Values of honor, courage, and commitment. It's important to accept help and encourage fellow Marines to seek help, because there are potential personal and professional consequences of unmanaged issues. Teamwork is important; it is your responsibility to intervene when a fellow Marine is in distress or making poor decisions. There are also current resources for assistance, including the "Big Five" resources: peers, chain of command, chaplain, medical/MCCS resources, and the DSTRESS Line (1-877-476-7734). When in doubt, members from the Substance Abuse Counseling Center (SACC) or medical staff can answer questions.

**Closing Statement:**

Marines are required to demonstrate enhanced decision-making, help-seeking, prevention, and intervention skills daily. When you became a Marine, you pledged to uphold the Marine Corps values of honor, courage, and commitment. Using synthetic drugs is contrary to every single one of those values. The Marine Corps has zero tolerance for these illicit substances. The objective for today was to provide you with information about common synthetic drugs and their serious physical and mental effects. You take grave risks if you use these drugs, both with your health and with your career as a Marine. If you encounter synthetic drugs, think about the facts you have learned and what it means to be a Marine.

**END OF DISCUSSION**

**RESOURCES**

MCO 5300.17, "Marine Corps Substance Abuse Program"

Drugs of Abuse, 2011 edition, Drug Enforcement Agency

DrugFacts series, National Institute on Drug Abuse

Synthetic Drugs Fact Sheet, February 2012, Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President

Synthetic Drugs 101: Trafficking & Abuse Trends, February 19, 2013, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)