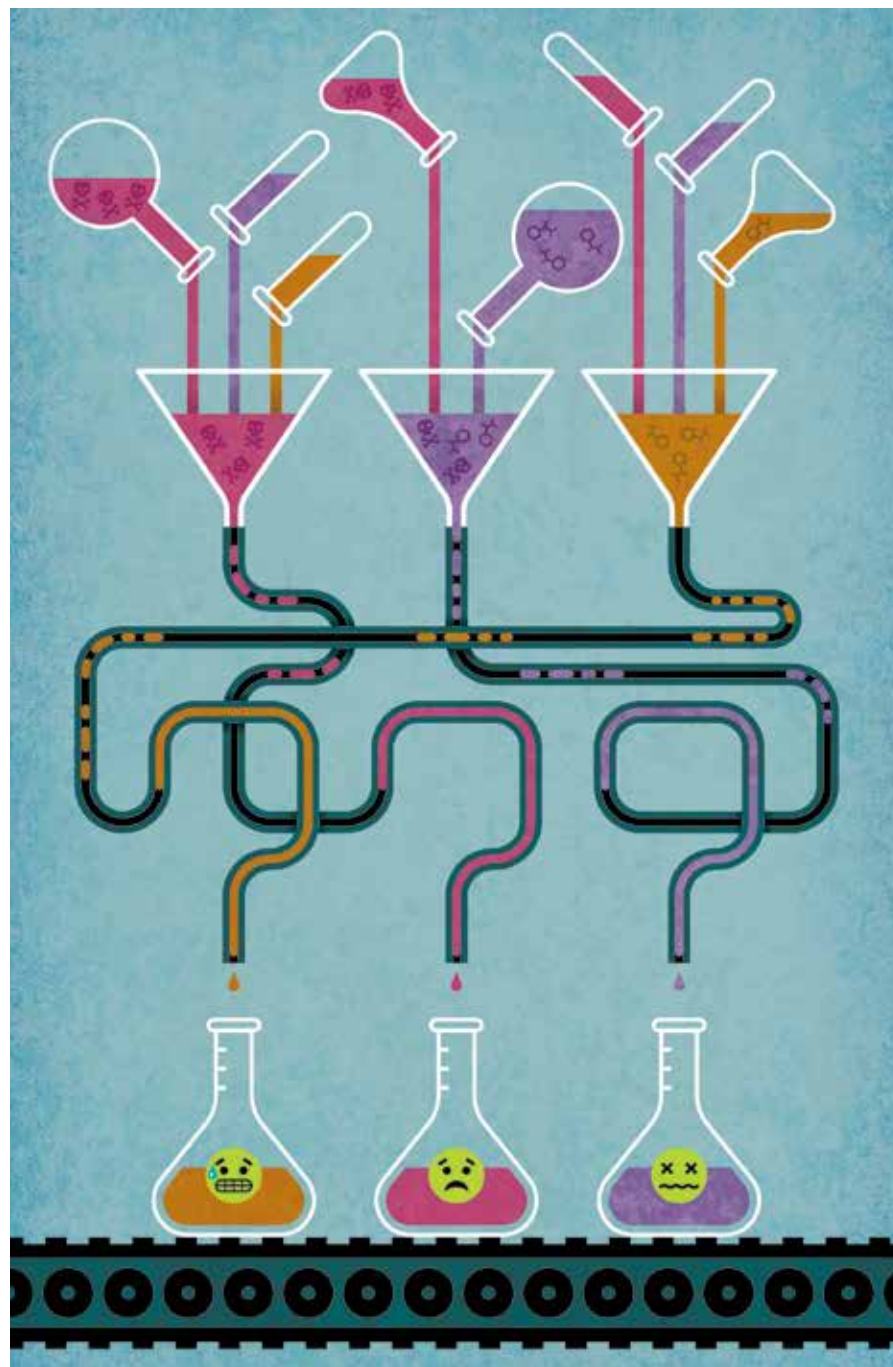


NOT FIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

You probably know that drugs that don't come from a pharmacy or other legal distributor can be dangerous. But they also may not be what they seem.

IN RECENT YEARS, emergency room doctors have reported a growing number of overdoses related to the use of certain types of synthetic drugs. Most drugs—even the ones that help people—are synthetic, which means that they're produced by mixing and creating chemicals in laboratories. The ones that are prescribed by doctors and bought in pharmacies or other legal retailers are tested to make sure that they are safe.

But now synthetic drugs are also being made in illegal or unregulated laboratories, mostly in foreign countries. The makers of these drugs create chemicals that act like other drugs, such as marijuana or prescription pain medications. The drugs are then sold on the street, online, or in gas stations or other stores, and are often marked with misleading labels.



While many drugs pose a risk for addiction and overdose if they are misused, these counterfeit synthetic drugs can carry additional risks. There is no way to know what chemicals the drugs contain or in what amounts. A product bought on the street or online may look the same as a familiar drug. It may even look identical to a pill a person

would buy in a pharmacy. But the drugs can contain completely different chemicals and be much more powerful, and potentially deadly.

Read the sidebar below to learn more about the dangers of counterfeit synthetic drugs.

Bottom line: Never take any prescription drug that is not prescribed for you and is not bought in a pharmacy.

TAKE ACTION



» If someone you know has a bad reaction to what you think is a synthetic drug, call your local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.

» If they stop breathing, collapse, or have a seizure, call 911 immediately.

DANGEROUS EFFECTS OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS



OPIOIDS

Example: Fentanyl

Opioids are powerful drugs that doctors prescribe to relieve pain. They can be extremely addictive and even deadly if they are misused. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is much stronger than other opioids. It is prescribed only to treat extreme pain in patients with cancer or following surgery.

Recently, there has been a rise in the illegal production of fentanyl. Illegally made fentanyl is often mixed with other drugs or hidden in fake prescription medications that are sold on the street. Users may not know they are taking it.

A surge in deadly overdoses related to opioids has been linked in part to products that contain hidden fentanyl. It is never safe to take prescription drugs that are not prescribed for you or that are bought anywhere other than at an official pharmacy because you don't know what chemicals they really contain.

CANNABINOIDS

Examples: Spice, K2

Often called "synthetic marijuana," these drugs are made of dried plant material that is sprayed with chemicals. These chemicals, called synthetic cannabinoids, are similar to THC, the main active ingredient in marijuana. But they are much more powerful than THC. The drugs can cause paranoia and violent behavior as well as serious health problems, including seizures, heart attacks, and death. Studies have also shown that the drug called Spice can be addictive.

130 people were treated over three days in New York City in 2016 for overdosing on synthetic cannabinoids. Health officials believe that the cause was a powerful batch of K2. Because the laboratories that make these products are not regulated, each batch can be very different, even if the packaging looks the same.

CATHINONES

Example: "Bath Salts"

Fake "bath salts" are different from the products used in your bathtub. These bath salts are synthetic drugs that contain chemicals called cathinones, which are designed to be similar to stimulant drugs such as amphetamine and MDMA (also known as Ecstasy or Molly). But these drugs can have more powerful effects. They can increase heart rate and blood pressure as well as cause hallucinations and paranoia.

Intense cravings have been reported by people who use bath salts. That's a sign that they have become dependent on the drug.

Makers of illegal synthetic drugs, including bath salts, sometimes try to avoid the law by labeling products as "Not for Human Consumption." Many states have passed laws to stop this practice.

MORE INFO: For additional facts about drugs and health, visit scholastic.com/headsup and teens.drugabuse.gov.

From Scholastic and the scientists of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services