Synthetic cannabinoids, also known as K2 or Spice, are not included in most routine drug test panels because they require specialized, more expensive testing.

Furthermore, studies have shown that the types and amounts of synthetic cannabinoid (SC) metabolites can vary greatly between products, lots, and even within the same package, making it difficult to decide which specific SC metabolite should be included in drug testing programs.

Some SC users use the drug as a substitute for marijuana to avoid positive drug tests, according a qualitative study of SC users in Southern California. The study found that:

- The majority of synthetic cannabinoid users reported that they used the drug to avoid positive drug tests, either because they were under community correctional supervisions, seeking employment, residing in a sober living facility, or joining the military. According to one user, “Spice would give you a weed like effect without the positive test”.
- “Most of the users of Spice-type products in this study consumed these products as a substitute for marijuana during drug-testing periods, and returned to marijuana use once that period ended” . According to one user, “I was trying to get a job where they were going to drug test . . . so I got that stuff [Spice], and I liked it enough. I enjoyed it. I did it for a while . . . Then, my job search ended ‘cause I wasn’t going to do any of them. So I went back to the regular stuff”.
- Nearly all the SC users learned of the drug from someone who was using SC to avoid detection on drug tests. For example, one user reported that he “was talking to some kids that went to a Christian school, and they get drug tested. So, all the kids there would smoke Spice instead of weed” .
- All the SC users also used marijuana, and half had a history of drug problems, such as sobriety attempts, drug-related offending, and negative drug experiences.
- Some of the SC users expressed concern over the health effects of the drug. “I don’t know what they’re putting in it. It kind of scares me, so I try not to do it that often”. Others experienced negative side-effects. “It [Spice] just doesn’t feel right. Way more of a stressor on your body, like your body is trying to deal with whatever cannabinoid that is in there, and it’s just like you experience it in a different way. It feels worse.” .

The authors note that while synthetic cannabinoid products are labeled as not being for human consumption and thus cannot be regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), “this tactic for circumventing the law does not appear to detract potential users form purchasing and consuming these untested, unknown and potentially harmful substances”.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Perrone, D., Helgesen, R.D., and Fischer, R.G., “United States Drug Prohibition and Legal Highs: How Drug Testing May Lead Cannabis Users to Spice,” *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*