

# What Is K2?

K2, also called synthetic cannabinoids, is made of harmful chemicals designed to act on the same brain receptors as THC, the main active component in cannabis. However, K2 is not the same as cannabis, and it has different effects.

These harmful chemicals are typically sprayed onto dried plant material and sold in colorful packaging. They are often misleadingly labeled as “herbal incense” or “not for human consumption,” even though they are commonly smoked, vaped, or ingested for their psychoactive effects.

Using K2 can lead to serious and unpredictable health risks, including death.

# K2

## Reducing the Harm

For free 24/7 support for mental health and substance use, call or text **988** or visit [nyc.gov/988](https://nyc.gov/988).

For more information on K2, visit [nyc.gov/k2](https://nyc.gov/k2).



## How to Reduce the Harm of K2 Use

Educate people about the unpredictable health effects of K2. Because the compounds present in K2, and their strength, can vary widely, even people who use K2 often may have unexpected reactions.

Encourage safer use practices, such as using in a familiar setting with others present, starting with small amounts, and avoiding mixing with alcohol or other substances.

Focus on supportive care and managing symptoms as they appear. There is no specific medication to reverse the effects of K2.



## How to Support Someone Who Has Used K2

K2 can cause unpredictable physical and psychological effects. The specific synthetic cannabinoid compounds and their strength can vary even within a single batch or product. This means someone who has used K2 before with no harmful reaction could have a bad reaction the next time they use it.

Outreach staff and other community-facing workers can support people who are using K2 by creating a calm, supportive, and nonjudgmental environment and building trust.



## How to Engage With Someone Experiencing Adverse Effects of K2

**Consent always matters:** Ask before touching, respect “no,” and find another way to comfort if necessary.

**Stay calm — you set the tone:** Speak slowly, gently, and clearly. Avoid sudden movements. Keep your body language open and nonthreatening.

**Acknowledge the “set and setting”:**

- Set: Their mindset (anxiety, fear, past trauma)
  - Acknowledge and affirm the person’s feelings
- Setting: The environment (noisy, bright, crowded)
  - Help them move to a quiet, calm space
  - Dim lights, reduce noise, and limit onlookers if possible

**If someone is anxious or hallucinating, you can ask for consent to lead them in grounding techniques:**

- Ask them to press their feet into the ground.
- Hand them something cold, such as a water bottle.
- Encourage slow, deep breathing. Breathe with them if it’s helpful.
- Describe the space around them: “We’re in the park. You’re safe.”



## How to Respond to Medical Emergencies

Call **911** immediately if someone is experiencing the following symptoms:

- Unresponsiveness
- Seizures
- Vomiting
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Irregular heartbeat

While you wait for emergency medical services (EMS), help them sit or lie down. If they are unconscious but breathing, place them in the recovery position:

- Roll them onto their side
- Tilt their head back slightly
- Bend their top knee to keep their body stable
- Keep their airway clear

If they’re not breathing, begin CPR if trained.

K2 is not an opioid, but if you see signs of an opioid overdose, administer naloxone if you have it nearby. Naloxone should be administered whenever an opioid overdose is suspected, even if opioids are not being used intentionally.

Keep the K2 packaging, if available, to show to EMS personnel.