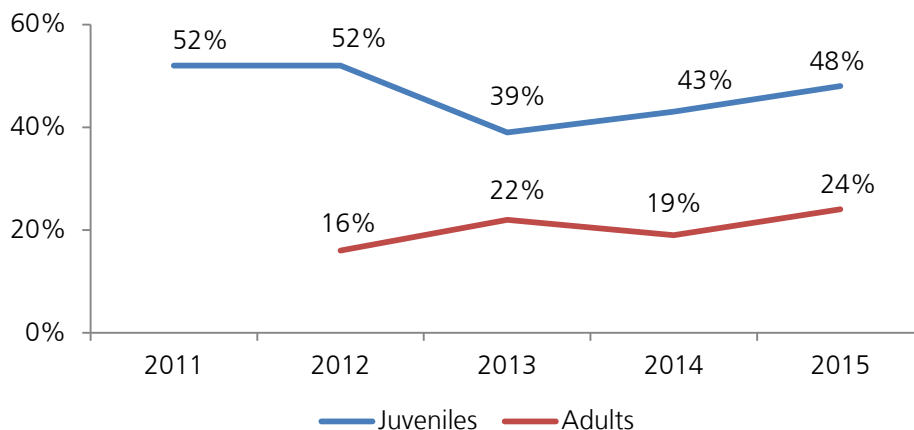


SPICE – WHAT IS IT, WHY DO PEOPLE USE IT, AND WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Spice, also known as synthetic marijuana or K-2, was first reported in the U.S. in December 2008, is sold over the counter and usually contains some herbal materials that have been sprayed with one or more designer chemicals that fall into the cannabinoid family. Because most of these products are labeled “not for human consumption”, the true intended purpose can be hidden and oversight by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) avoided. The effects of spice can include agitation and anxiety, nausea, vomiting, increased heartbeat, elevated blood pressure, tremors and seizures, hallucinations, dilated pupils, and suicidal and other harmful thoughts and actions. In March 2011, with the growing popularity and availability of spice becoming apparent, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) scheduled some of the most widely used chemicals in spice, making their possession and sale no longer legal. Since then, however, producers have continued to circumvent the law by revising their chemical formulas to avoid control, even though subsequent laws have expanded the list of banned chemicals.

In San Diego County, several jurisdictions (Chula Vista, El Cajon, Encinitas, Oceanside, Poway, San Marcos, and the County) have made efforts to address the availability and use of spice by enacting local ordinances. On May 23, 2016, the City of San Diego joined the fight when the City Council unanimously approved a new [ordinance](#) that aims to reverse the trend of increased use of spice by prosecuting street dealers and small markets that sell the drug and by shifting the focus away from the ingredients towards its effects on the brain.¹ As part of the SANDAG Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, questions regarding the use of spice by arrestees have been asked since 2011 for juveniles and 2012 for adults. As Figure 1 shows, juveniles interviewed in Juvenile Hall self-reported having ever tried spice at a greater rate than adult arrestees; but for both groups, the percent has increased the past two years, with around half (48%) of juvenile arrestees and one-fourth (24%) of adult arrestees in 2015 reporting they had ever tried it; 75 percent of juveniles and 44 percent of adults who reported prior use also said they had used it in the last year. Additional analyses revealed that for both adults and juveniles, there were no significant differences in use by gender or ethnicity; but for adults, those under the age of 25 (35%) were more likely to report prior use, compared to those 25 to 39 (15%) or 40 and older (9%).

Figure 1
PERCENT OF ADULT² AND JUVENILE ARRESTEES WHO REPORT EVER USING SPICE 2011-2015



¹ At the time of this publication, the San Diego City ordinance is scheduled to return to the City Council for a second reading in June 2016 and if approved, along with an emergency ordinance, would go into effect immediately.

² 2015 data presented here should be considered preliminary and could change as data from this most recent calendar year are finalized.

In addition to questions regarding prior use, in 2015 juveniles were asked how bad they think spice is; both adults and juveniles were asked if they ever used spice as an alternative to marijuana and if they ever used it to avoid detection on a drug test. As Figure 2 shows, juveniles who had tried spice were *less* likely to think it was “very or extremely bad” for them than those who had never tried it, but the majority still thought it was harmful, even though they had used it. As Figure 3 shows, the majority of both juveniles (83%) and adults (62%) reported they had used spice as an alternative to marijuana, and around two in five (43% and 38%, respectively) had used it to avoid detection for drug use.

Figure 2
JUVENILE ARRESTEE PERCEPTION OF HOW BAD SPICE IS BY PRIOR SELF-REPORTED USE

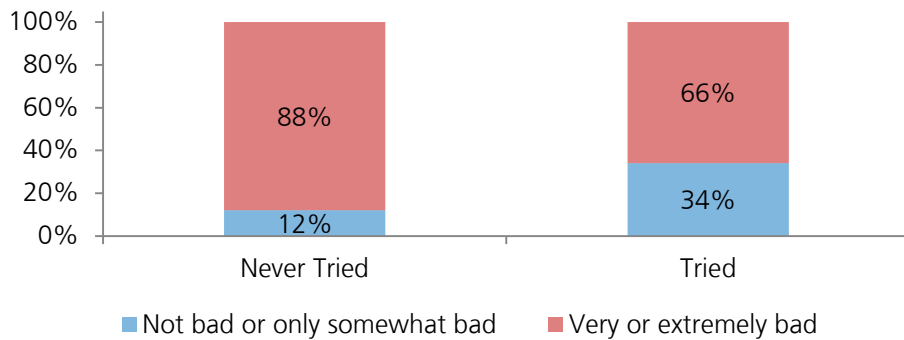
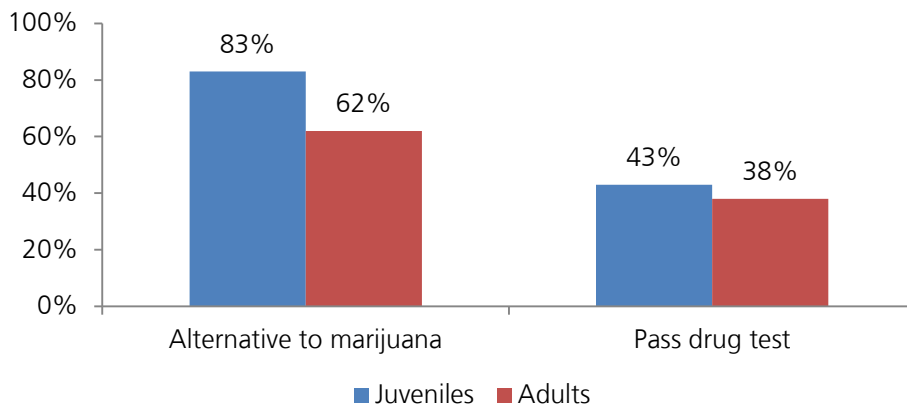


Figure 3
JUVENILE AND ADULT ARRESTEES WHO USED SPICE AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MARIJUANA AND TO AVOID A POSITIVE DRUG TEST



The City of San Diego is acknowledged for its proactive and innovative cooperation to bring this ordinance forward as there is a need for more policies and legislation regarding the distribution, as well as education about the health risks posed by these substances.