

Counseling Women about Risks of Synthetic Cathinones (“Bath Salts”)

In Europe, Canada, and the northeastern and central U.S, the use of a group of stimulant-like chemicals commonly known as “bath salts” or “salts” is increasing. These compounds are described generally as synthetic cathinones, but what is sold often varies in chemical makeup due to manufacturing in unregulated labs. The most common chemical constituent of “bath salts” is methylenedioxypropylamphetamine (MDPV), which is difficult to detect through standard testing approaches. These compounds are highly toxic with potentially life-long effects.

Key points:

- Bath salts are available via the internet as a powder which can be swallowed, snorted, or injected
- This group of compounds is highly toxic, impacting the central and autonomic nervous systems, the cardiovascular system, and renal and hepatic function (White et al, 2016; Imam, et al, 2013; Banks, et al, 2014; Winder, et al 2011)
- Immediate symptoms following bath salts ingestion can include
 - Euphoria and sexual excitement
 - Paranoia
 - Confusion
 - Hallucinations and blurred vision
 - Hyperthermia
 - Profuse sweating
 - Muscle twitching or seizure
 - Tachycardia and chest pain
 - Hypertension
 - Decreased peripheral circulation
- Long term effects may include
 - Depression and suicidality
 - Psychosis

- Kidney damage or failure
 - Skin breakdown at injection site, rash, cellulitis
 - Muscle injury
 - Tolerance and withdrawal
- Risks of bath salts ingestion during pregnancy are unknown but given the physiological effects of the chemical, highly concerning given the autonomic and cardiovascular symptoms which can develop (see Gray and Holland, 2014)
- Treatment is supportive, and patients should be linked to intensive outpatient or residential treatment programs
- Routine toxicology tests are unable to reliably detect cathinones, and tests sent out to specialty laboratories have high false negative rates.

Information for providers about synthetic cathinones (“bath salts”)

- From the National Institute on Drug Abuse:
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/synthetic-cathinones-bath-salts>
- From Health Canada:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-abuse/controlled-illegal-drugs/bath-salts.html>

Information for patients about bath salts

- From the National Institute on Drug Abuse:
<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/bath-salts>