

New Psychedelic Drug in Maine – Salvia **by Steve Danzig, LMSW-CC, LADC, CCS**

Salvia Divinorum, more commonly known as Salvia, has been gaining more popularity in the last few years. Recently it has been identified in Maine as a new favorite recreational drug among teenagers and early 20-somethings.

Salvia is a psychoactive substance producing effects similar to LSD, psilocybin (mushrooms), and mescaline. However, unlike those psychotropics, Salvia works in different regions of the brain. As such, the medical community does not fully understand why it has the same effects on the brain as other psychotropic drugs. Consequently, the short-term and long-term health risks have yet to be identified. But there is always the immediate risk of danger to the user when using a psychedelic drug since they are in a “dream-like world” and cannot make rational decisions about personal safety. Therefore medical personnel have issued strong cautions against using Salvia alone. Most of their discussions about the substance suggest that users have a ‘sitter’ keep an eye on them during use.

First effects are noticed between 20-60 seconds after smoking, increasing to peak effects within 1-2 minutes. The primary effects of Salvia last between 5-15 minutes. Then there is a come-down period of 20-40 minutes before returning to baseline. Depending on the dosage taken, the Salvia experience can vary from a subtle intoxication to a full-blown psychedelic experience. At higher doses, users report dramatic time distortion, vivid imagery, encounters with beings, and travel to other places, planets or times. Once these full effects are achieved, many people find Salvia to be unpleasantly overwhelming and more scary than fun.

There are numerous countries around the world that have made Salvia illegal by classifying it in the same classification as LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs. And at least ten states have also classified Salvia as a controlled substance making it illegal to possess. But since Salvia has not been classified as illegal by the federal government, each state has to come to their own conclusion regarding the legality of the substance. Maine has had discussions around the topic of Salvia but further information on any final decision is not available at this time.

Salvia is in the sage family of spices. It is available in many smoke shops and places which specialize in herbs and spices, including sites on the internet. This makes it easily available to anyone wishing to experiment with Salvia. But because it’s like a spice, it is difficult for parents to recognize it visually. However, given the recent increase in use as well as its potential for abuse, it would be wise for parents of teens and young adults to be very conscientious and critical of any substance their children are and/or may be smoking. You should also be suspect if your child has a new interest in “cleansing the energy of their room by sage-ing it”. This is a cover-up for explaining the sage-like smell.

If you suspect that your child may be using Salvia, immediately schedule an assessment with a licensed alcohol and drug counselor (“LADC”) or other qualified alcohol and substance abuse provider that specializes in adolescent/young adult treatment. If the assessment indicates that there is a problem, your alcohol and drug counselor can recommend the best course of treatment.

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