

39 factsheet



DrugWatch

Black Mamba



This factsheet is produced under the auspices of DrugWatch, an informal association of organisations including DrugScope, Lifeline, Crew 2000 and UKHRA, who share an interest in establishing a robust and flexible early warning system for drugs in the UK. This would include both illegal drugs and so-called 'legal highs'. A website for DrugWatch is under construction.

Black Mamba is the brand name for a light green herbal product that tests show contains the synthetic cannabinoid AM-2201 and Oleamide. Examples of packaging are shown below.

Structurally, AM-2201 bears a close resemblance to the more frequently reported JWH-018. However, AM-2201 is not currently controlled in the UK. Oleamide, a naturally occurring substance, is the amide of the fatty acid oleic acid. It induces sleep in animals and is being studied as a potential treatment for sleep and mood disorders. It is not controlled in the UK and may be added to enhance the effect of the synthetic cannabis.

Practitioners should be aware that there is a strain of real cannabis called Black Mamba and an energy-burning product called 'Black Mamba - hyper rush', aimed at bodybuilders (allegedly containing ephedra).

Where is it bought and how much does it cost?

As with other 'legal highs', this product retails from head shops and online. AM-2201, one of the active ingredients, is also being sold in its own right, both by the gram and in wholesale amounts. Typically, Black Mamba users are reporting that they have paid £10 for a packet containing a gram, or £25 for a 3g packet of herbal material

What does it look like?

The product itself looks like light green buds or herbal matter; no stalks or leaves are present although occasionally a very small red seed has been seen. When sniffed inside the packaging, a strong solvent / chemical smell can be detected, but there does not seem to be a strong smell on the buds themselves, nor does the product give off a strong odour when smoked.

On the green Kanna-branded packaging samples pictured here, the writing on the back is so small it is almost illegible, but it does state that it is legal in Russia and the EU (with no information about what the product actually is). User reports in this briefing all refer to the Kanna product.

The black packaging also pictured is for a product

which comes from a US based website supplying users with products in UK prices. This Black Mamba product seems to be more expensive than the Kanna Black Mamba and may not be the same substance. There are reports that Black Mamba is available as a white crystalline powder form, although there is no forensic data to back this claim at present.

Effects/risks

According to user reports, when smoked, the substance has 'skunk-like' qualities but is much more likely to cause uncomfortable distortions in reality and hallucinations.

It may cause breathing difficulties, vomiting, severe rashes, increased heart rate and cardiac arrhythmia (heart skipping beats) and 'loss of control' over some parts of the body. There are press reports of people being admitted to A&E after using the drug (see user reports below). It is reportedly as habit-forming as cannabis but long term risks associated with its use are unknown.

Users should be advised of the potency of the product and to use far less than a like for like measure of skunk. They should also be warned about the potential increased potency of the drug at the bottom of the bag where small amounts of whitish crystals have gathered which have probably fallen off the green buds. Even at tiny doses, these crystals are significantly stronger than the rest of the contents and likely to cause severe psychological reactions.

User reports

Two regular cannabis users from Manchester gave DrugWatch an account of their experiences of smoking Black Mamba. Both agreed that it was "much stronger than skunk" and that the high was both 'instant' and 'intense' - one said it was "like smoking weed but without the sunshine feeling." Hallucinations and visual distortions came on quickly and were disturbing. "It took me to a very uncomfortable place where I didn't want to be." Vomiting, loss of control of parts of the body and breathing difficulties were also reported.



A drug worker from North Tyneside took this report directly from a client, who had been hospitalised after smoking the drug for the first time with a group of friends. Almost immediately after inhaling the product, he described experiencing profuse sweating, a pounding headache and the feeling of having taken a stimulant. After an estimated two minutes, his reaction worsened:

“My throat started swelling up and I couldn’t breathe. You couldn’t touch my skin – it felt horrible and really hurt to touch. My skin came out in a rash and there were red blotches everywhere. It felt like my body was shutting down [...], like my body was going to explode. I fell on the floor and vomited everywhere and couldn’t stop being sick. I was twitching and couldn’t control my body. I can remember everything – I could hear everything but couldn’t control my body.”

He was taken to A&E and released the following morning, but later on had to be readmitted to hospital after finding it extremely difficult to breathe again. Staff from his support lodgings verified the account given by the client to the drug worker and reported that he had been given adrenaline, Amoxicillin and Piriton in hospital. The man reported that it was a week before he felt normal again. However to our knowledge in neither of these cases has the presence of AM-2201 or oleamide been confirmed in urine or blood samples.

Summary

- The name Black Mamba can refer to various different products; this briefing relates to a synthetic cannabis product. AM-2201 and oleamide are not currently controlled substances. The role of oleamide is unclear.
- When smoked, Black Mamba is fast acting and has ‘skunk-like’ qualities but is more likely to cause uncomfortable distortions in reality and hallucinations.
- Physical side effects include vomiting, breathing difficulties, painful rash and loss of control of body parts. One hospitalisation as a result of a severe reaction has been documented by DrugWatch.
- Users should be made aware of potency and potential risk to life if a severe reaction occurs.

Please note: DrugWatch is not suggesting that this particular compound is any more dangerous than any others in the large family of synthetic cannabis compounds, nor that others are safe. It is simply that this one has come to the attention of DrugWatch members.