

Montanans who care about youth mental health and substance abuse prevention—this newsletter is for you. From Fentanyl awareness events to the devastating effects of cannabis, Kratom and inhalants, our latest updates expose the real crises threatening our communities. Whether it's a heart-wrenching documentary or alarming new data, each story highlights why awareness and action are more urgent than ever. Read on, stay informed and share these truths—because together, we can save lives.

what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

August 2025, Issue 8

Great Falls Bridge to Light Up Blue August 21 for Fentanyl Prevention & Awareness



On August 21, the 10th Street Bridge in Great Falls will be illuminated in **blue** to commemorate National Fentanyl Prevention and Awareness Day, a nationwide observance established by Facing Fentanyl and families impacted by the fentanyl crisis. Sponsored locally by Alliance for Youth and the Cascade County Substance Abuse Prevention Alliance, this symbolic gesture is part of a growing effort to honor lives lost, raise awareness and take action to prevent further tragedy.

Illicit fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat our nation has ever faced. A majority of overdose deaths occur when individuals are alone and CDC data shows that **59% of fatal overdoses involved**

missed opportunities for intervention. These realities highlight the urgent need for community education, connection and vigilance.

This day brings together families, first responders, prevention advocates, educators and communities to remember those we've lost and to work together toward a safer future. Events across the country include memorials, public education efforts and policy discussions—all aimed at saving lives.

The **blue** lighting of the 10th Street Bridge is a solemn tribute and a visible call to action. **Behind each statistic is a family forever changed—parents, siblings, children and friends who live with deep and lasting grief.** Their stories remind us that this crisis is personal and everywhere. National Fentanyl Prevention and Awareness Day is more than a date—it's a moment for action, unity and hope. Together, we honor those taken, support those left behind and stand with those working every day to educate, prevent and protect.

Cannabis-Induced Psychosis: A Silent Epidemic



Cannabis-Induced Psychosis: A Silent Epidemic is a **45-minute documentary** from [Johnny's Ambassadors](#) that sheds light on the often-overlooked crisis of **cannabis-induced psychosis in young people**. Through raw and personal testimonies from those who experienced psychosis firsthand and the families who supported them, the film exposes the **devastating impact of high-potency THC**. It offers both emotional narratives and expert medical

insight, revealing a mental health emergency with few solutions. Created as a public service, the film aims to raise awareness and spark dialogue about the risks of youth cannabis use. It is powerful and well-worth your time. [CLICK HERE TO VIEW](#).

Man Slices Off Genitals & Ears During in Kratom-Fueled Psychotic Episode

This story about a 31-year-old man from Czechia is honestly shocking and tragic. After taking Kratom, a herbal supplement known for its opioid-like effects, he had a severe psychotic break and ended up inflicting horrifying injuries on himself. Kratom is often marketed as a natural energy booster or pain reliever, but at high doses, it can cause hallucinations and other serious side effects—especially dangerous for someone with underlying mental health issues like schizophrenia. In this case, doctors believe the Kratom played a major role in triggering the episode, especially since he had stopped taking his antipsychotic meds. It's a chilling reminder that “natural” doesn't always mean safe, especially when mental illness is involved. [READ MORE](#).

High Today, Toothless Tomorrow?

Compared with people who do not use marijuana frequently, people reporting frequent marijuana use had 41% higher odds of having severe tooth loss. For cavities, the likelihood is 17% higher and for decay at the roots it's 55% higher odds. These troubling findings, from the Journal of the American Dental Association, reveal yet another negative impact of weed on health over a significant sample size: almost 6,000 people. Heart disease, dementia and tooth decay—this stuff sure is safe and great! Any addiction profiteer who doesn't admit the increasingly impossible-to-ignore fact that weed destroys your health on every level is lying through their rotten teeth.

Sources: [*The Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions*](#) and [*Smart Approaches to Marijuana*](#).

The numbers on what weed does to your teeth are clear:



24-Year-Old Suffers Heart Attack, Now Has Lungs of a 70-Year-Old



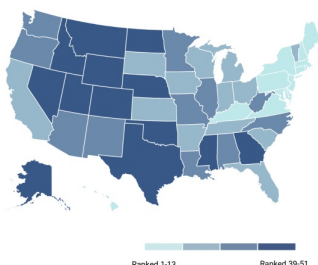
A 24-year-old man is sounding the alarm on vaping after suffering a heart attack and being left with the lungs of a 70-year-old. In a series of viral TikTok videos, he shared that years of using e-cigarettes—starting at just 12—caused permanent lung damage, leaving him gasping for air and unable to breathe normally. Describing the sensation as “**breathing through a straw**,” he revealed he’ll never regain full lung capacity and now relies on a rescue inhaler to get through the day. Though the damage is irreversible, he hopes his story pushes others to quit before they face similar consequences. His warning comes amid growing evidence linking vaping to serious health risks, including respiratory disease and even cancer. [READ MORE.](#)

Thank You, Super 1 Foods



We sincerely appreciate your dedication to promoting safety and acting responsibly. By **asking for identification from everyone** who wishes to purchase alcohol, nicotine or tobacco, you help ensure compliance with the law and contribute to a safer environment for all.

Crisis in Big Sky Country: Montana Falls to 49th in U.S. Mental Health Report



Montana ranks 49th overall in the nation for mental health, according to 2024 *The State of Mental Health in America* by Mental Health America.

Contributing factors include:

- 27.12% of adults in Montana have any mental illness (ranked 46th)
- 6.02% of adults have serious thoughts of suicide (ranked 48th)
- 14.64% of youth have serious thoughts of suicide (ranked 48th)

The report emphasizes the need for an **upstream public health approach** focused on **primary prevention** and the promotion of well-being. It provides national and state-level data and covers topics such as:

- State Rankings
- Adult and Youth Prevalence of Mental Illness
- Access to Care
- Mental Health Workforce Availability
- Effectiveness of Youth Treatment
- Prevention and Housing Solution

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE REPORT.](#)

TIPS FOR TALKING TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (6-10 YEARS OLD)

- Children this age are eager to learn. You can talk to them about the consequences of using substances, such as how it can lead to misuse and a substance use disorder. You can continue to teach and encourage good choices around healthy living.
- Establish rituals that afford uninterrupted conversations with your child. Having dinner or other meals together provides a rich opportunity to listen and talk.
- Explain good drugs versus bad drugs. Let them know that children should only take medication when the adult in charge tells them to.
- Repeat your message regularly. Remind children that some drugs can harm the brain or cause life-threatening overdoses.
- Children crave praise, so give it out freely when deserved. Tell them that you trust their ability to avoid peer pressure and make good decisions.
- If your child does not start conversations about alcohol or other drugs with you, take the lead. Begin discussions using real-life events in the news or in your own lives. This is true no matter your child's age.

HOW DO I TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT DRUGS? – CONVERSATION STARTERS

Some parents find it difficult to talk with their children about alcohol and other drugs. But it is important to teach them about these substances and about your expectations if they are offered drugs.

These conversations are not a one-time event. Start talking with your children when they are young; continue as they grow older and their level of interest and understanding changes. Your willingness to talk (and listen) tells them you care about what they are interested in, and it provides you with insight into their world.

DO	DON'T
Explain the dangers using language they understand. Explain why you do not want them to use the substance(s). For example, explain that substances can mess up their concentration, memory, and motor skills and can lead to poor grades.	React in anger—even if your child makes statements that shock you. Expect all conversations with your children to be perfect. They won't be.
Be there when your child wants to talk, no matter the time of day or night or other demands on your time.	Assume your children know how to handle temptation. Instead, educate them about risks and alternatives so they can make healthy decisions. Encourage them to practice saying no ahead of time so they're prepared.
Believe in your own power to help your child grow up without using drugs, including alcohol.	Talk without listening.
Praise your children when they deserve it. This builds their self-esteem and makes them feel good without using drugs, including alcohol.	Make stuff up. If your child asks a question you can't answer, promise to find the answer so you can learn together. Then follow up.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Talking to your children about alcohol and other drugs does not have to be hard. The following opportunities can serve as teaching moments:

	If you see a young person smoking, talk about the negative effects of tobacco.
	If you see an interesting news story, discuss it with your child. Ask how your child feels about situations and the potential consequences.
	While watching a movie or TV show with your children, ask if they think it makes using drugs, including alcohol, look fun. Talk about what happens to those characters, or what happens in reality.
	If you read, hear about, or know someone affected by substance use, remind your child almost anyone can develop a substance use disorder. Discuss the importance of treatment and supporting people in recovery from their substance use disorder.

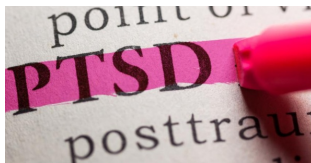
Teens' Mental Health Suffers Near Weed Retail

"Even though teens can't legally buy cannabis, they're still being exposed to it—through advertising, older peers, social media, and sheer proximity. This study reinforces the importance of where and how cannabis is sold in protecting adolescent mental health, showing significant impacts—even on severe conditions like psychosis."

—Dr. Lynn Silver, Pediatrician and Director, Getting it Right from the Start, Public Health Institute

[READ MORE ABOUT THE STUDY.](#)

PTSD & Substance Use: A Strong Connection



Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after someone experiences a traumatic event — like an assault, accident, disaster or loss. While often associated with veterans, PTSD affects many people from all walks of life.

To cope with overwhelming symptoms like anxiety, flashbacks and distressing thoughts, many turn to drugs or alcohol. But **this relief is temporary — and often leads to long-term problems.**

Research from the National Center for PTSD shows a strong link between PTSD and substance use disorder (SUD):

- About 46% of people with lifetime PTSD also meet criteria for SUD
- Women with PTSD are 2x more likely to abuse alcohol and 4x more likely to abuse drugs
- Men are about 2–3x more likely

Substance misuse can worsen PTSD symptoms and lead to addiction. The good news: help is available. Effective treatments like therapy and medication can make a difference.

If you or someone you know is struggling, call or text 988 — the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — for free, confidential support 24/7.

[Source](#)

Lights, Camera, Addiction



On-screen smoking, which is often glamorized and portrayed as edgy and cool, remains stubbornly common across entertainment media as evidence grows of its **harmful impact on young viewers.**

Truth Initiative's Lights, Camera, Addiction report shows that tobacco imagery appears in nearly half of top films, many binge-watched shows and almost 1 in 4 music videos—media heavily

consumed by youth.

This exposure can **triple the likelihood of young people starting to smoke or vape**, putting 1.6 million middle and high schoolers at serious risk. Years of research have established a strong link between exposure to tobacco imagery and tobacco use and yet tobacco persists on screens.

Truth Initiative calls for a comprehensive set of actions and policies to mitigate the harm and protect young audiences. [Click here to read the report.](#)

Inhalants: The Silent Killers in Your Home



Inhalants are invisible, volatile substances found in more than 1,000 common household products, e.g., felt tip markers, spray paint, air freshener, butane, computer cleaners and glue. Street names include Gluey, Huff, Rush and Whippets.

How are they used?

- Inhaled through nose or mouth
- Huffing inhalant-soaked rag stuffed in mouth
- Inhaling from balloon with nitrous oxide
- Sniffing or snorting the substance from a container or dispenser
- Inhaling fumes from substances in a bag

How do inhalants affect the body?

- Slight stimulation, feeling less inhibition, loss of consciousness
- Damages sections of brain controlling thinking, moving, seeing and hearing
- Slurred speech, loss of coordination, euphoria, dizziness
- Long-term use may cause damage to nervous system and organs
- Sudden sniffing death may occur from suffocation or asphyxiation

[READ MORE ABOUT INHALANTS.](#)

Montana Substance Violation Reporting: What to Know & Where to Go

- **Unlawful or Suspicious Alcohol-Related Activities** - Report violations such as underage drinking or serving/selling to someone who is actually, apparently or obviously intoxicated. [CLICK HERE.](#)
- **Cannabis-Related Issues**
 - For concerns regarding **medical or adult-use cannabis dispensaries**, [CLICK HERE.](#)
 - Report illegal sale or use of **synthetic cannabis** by [CLICKING HERE.](#)
 - If you suspect **illegal sale of consumable hemp products** (not authorized as a food or drug by the FDA), report it by [CLICKING HERE.](#)
- **Tobacco/Nicotine Product Violation** - Report sales to under the age of 21 to keep nicotine and tobacco out of the hands of youth. [CLICK HERE.](#)
- **Clean Indoor Air Act Violations** - Submit violations including vaping, which is now included under the Act. [CLICK HERE.](#)



Reminder: Vaping is now included in Montana's Clean Indoor Air Act. To help your business or organization comply and reduce enforcement issues, free 5" x 7" "No Smoking, Vaping or Marijuana" signs are available for entrances.

Order your free signs here:

<https://mthhs promotions.rocsoft.com/public/login>
(Quick account setup required)

Be a Voice for Prevention: Volunteer to Record a "What's Trending?" Podcast

In partnership with Alliance for Youth, the Cascade County Substance Abuse Prevention Alliance (SAPA), Great Falls/Cascade County Crimestoppers and KGPR, the What's Trending? podcast is recorded and aired on 89.9 KGPR every month.

For nearly two years, SAPA members, AFY staff, community partners and Crimestoppers have

volunteered their time to bring these 7–10-minute podcasts to life, based on the monthly What's Trending? newsletter.

We're inviting community leaders, partners, youth and citizens to join us by volunteering to record an episode. It's a simple and rewarding way to support youth and community wellness.

- **Recording Time:** Fridays at 12:30 p.m.
- **Location:** KGPR (Great Falls College Campus)
- **Script Provided:** Yes
- **Experience Needed:** None! Don't worry about being perfect—Eric and his top-notch editing skills have you covered.

If you're interested in lending your voice, please contact bmorrison@allianceforyouth.org.

Listen to the **July 2025** episode of the *What's Trending?* podcast on 89.9 KGPR, proudly supported by [Great Falls/Cascade County Crimestoppers](#). In this episode, we cover the latest trends in drug and alcohol use in our community. [Click here](#) to listen now!



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