

This issue of *What's Trending* in Great Falls and Cascade County covers a range of emerging substance and behavioral concerns. It explores why Kratom remains legal and unprescribed despite its opioid-like effects, highlights challenges with online age verification for restricted products and examines “Green Gut Syndrome,” a new gut-health concern. The issue also looks at gambling addiction in teens, the risks of heated tobacco products for Montanans and the contrasting approaches parents take to texting and driving. Together, these topics offer a snapshot of local public-health trends, safety risks and regulatory gaps affecting the community.

# what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

*December 2025, Issue 12*

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## Why Isn't Kratom a Prescription Drug? The Answer Might Shock You

If Kratom were truly the miracle plant its promoters claim, **Big Pharma would have cashed in long ago.** This is the same industry that turned Tramadol and Suboxone into billion-dollar blockbusters. They'll slap a brand name and an \$800 price tag on anything that passes the minimum safety test.

**So why not Kratom?** The answer is simple: **It fails the safety screen before it even gets out of the lab.** No pharmaceutical company wants to risk billions on a compound that self-destructs in Phase I safety trials. Drug development is about profit, not charity. If Kratom had legitimate medical potential, you'd see it in every pain clinic across America.

So if it's too toxic for drug approval, how did Kratom end up in your local smoke shop? Answer: **loopholes.** Kratom didn't crash the U.S. market because it worked. It crashed it because it found cracks in our law. Until Congress and State Legislatures patch those cracks, the next “miracle” gas-station supplement could be anything — your lawn clippings, your compost pile or the next untested plant branded as “ancient wellness.” [READ MORE.](#)

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## Age Verification Online? That's Cute!

Parents, here's the truth. **Social media age limits are imaginary.** Every week, social media platforms announce some shiny new “age-restricted safety measure.” Parents breathe a sigh of relief—believing somehow that tech companies would sacrifice their money for the safety of your child.

- Instagram Teen Mode
- Snapchat Parent Controls

- Roblox age restrictions
- & other imaginary safety nets

Here's the spoiler: **None of them actually verify your child's age.** A fake birthday or a borrowed adult face and—poof!—they're through the gate. If tech companies really wanted safety, Apple or Android could add a global verified birthday setting that locks into every app.

But since that hasn't happened... **Stay alert, stay involved and never assume an app is doing your parenting for you.** [Courtesy: Officer Gomez](#)

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## Green Gut Syndrome: When Weed Turns Against You

It begins with unbearable pain—a teen doubled over, vomiting for hours, desperate for relief that only scalding showers seem to bring. Doctors call it Green Gut Syndrome, or Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS)—a cruel twist where **heavy marijuana use turns the “natural remedy” into the poison.** It hits in waves: nausea and dread, then violent vomiting and agony, then brief recovery that vanishes if use resumes. **Beyond the misery lie real dangers—torn throats, kidney failure and even brain swelling.**

The scariest part? **Most teens have never heard of it—until it's too late.** [READ MORE.](#) (Source: Michael DeLeon, [Steered Straight](#))

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## Warning Signs of Gambling Addiction in Teens: What Parents Should Know

In a world where a teenager's smartphone is never far away, **the line between gaming and gambling has never been thinner**—and the stakes have never been higher.

A recent news article reveals how **online betting platforms are quietly targeting adolescents** whose impulse control and risk awareness are still developing, putting them at serious risk of addiction.

With features that mimic video games and offer instant rewards, these sites craft a dangerous illusion of harmless fun that can swiftly spiral into financial loss, academic decline and emotional isolation. The article also highlights **what to watch for**—sudden money problems, mood changes, secretive behavior—and offers clear steps for prevention and early intervention.

Dive into the full story to understand how this hidden threat is evolving—and what you can do to protect the young people in your life. [READ MORE.](#)

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## Understanding ‘Heated’ Tobacco: What Montanans Should Know

The tobacco industry was very active at the Montana Legislature this year promoting **Heated Tobacco Products (HTP)**, which are devices that heat tobacco without burning it. Since we know the industry will be back in 2027 to lobby state lawmakers with claims that HTPs are “safer alternatives,” a [recent study](#) by the **Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)** provides a cautionary counterbalance: **there is no clear evidence these products are safe and lower exposure to some chemicals does not guarantee reduced disease risk.**

**Dual use is very common**—many people continue to smoke cigarettes while also using HTPs—so any expected benefit may vanish and health risks could persist or even increase. Early research suggests that the heart and vascular system, a major cause of death, may be similarly affected by HTPs as by conventional cigarettes, at least in the short term. **Promoting these**



products as “less harmful” can therefore mislead consumers.

From a public health perspective, the best strategy remains quitting all tobacco products rather than switching to HTPs. **Regulatory and policy decisions should consider youth uptake, marketing tactics, enforcement of age limits and ongoing monitoring of these products.** For citizens, awareness of the hype around “heated” products enables smarter questions: “Is this really safer?” “What about the long term?” “Am I just using both types of products?”

Policymakers need to approach HTPs with caution, not assume they are harmless. [READ MORE.](#)



## 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.](#)
- **Montana 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 “No Smoking, Vaping or Marijuana” signs are available for entrances.

**Order your free signs here:**  
<https://mthhs promotions.rocsoft.com/public/login>

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