

This issue of *What's Trending* highlights new risks facing youth and communities—from Kratom and Kava drinks sold without age limits to the vulnerable first six weeks of college when underage drinking often starts. We look at teen marijuana use and suicide risk, current Montana suicide data, hidden dangers like Benadryl and why nicotine isn't the answer. Plus, we cover gaps in Kratom regulation, marijuana and heart disease, and the expanded support available through 988.

# what's trending?

## ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

September 2025, Issue 9

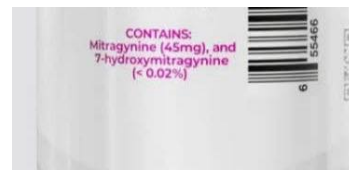
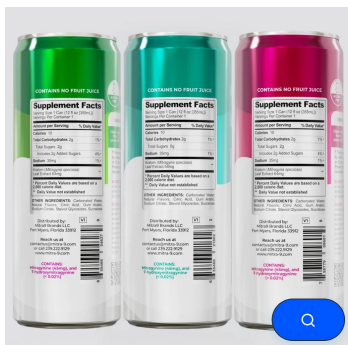
### Not Your Average Seltzer: What's Really in That Can?

That trendy drink at the gas station might look like just another fruity seltzer—but it could pack a punch you didn't sign up for. Across Montana, including right here in Great Falls, flavored drinks containing 7-Hydroxymitragynine (aka 7-Hydroxy) are hitting shelves disguised as harmless refreshments. What's 7-Hydroxy? It's a highly potent compound derived from the Kratom plant, and it behaves a lot like an opioid—only it's tucked inside a can with a splashy label and barely a warning in sight.

**Extracted from Kratom and concentrated into drinks, 7-Hydroxy is no joke.** The FDA cracked down in July 2025, warning companies for illegally marketing these unregulated beverages. Some products have even been flagged in California for containing high levels of lead. Still, they're sold like soft drinks, with few restrictions and even fewer explanations.

**Here's the catch:** Mitragynine, a compound in Kratom, turns into 7-Hydroxy once it hits your liver—intensifying the effects. That means a drink that looks like a sparkling water could hit your system like a much stronger substance. And you might not know it until it's too late.

**What You Can Do:** Before you pop the tab, read the fine print. If the ingredients list Mitragynine or 7-Hydroxymitragynine, you're not just drinking a seltzer—you're rolling the dice. Ask local stores what they're stocking. Push for clearer labeling, tighter regulations and real age limits. And if you're worried, speak up. Your local health department or legislators need to hear from you.





## You've gotten your kids this far, but PARENTS, YOU'RE NOT DONE YET.



The transition from high school to college—and everything that comes after—can be a tricky time. New freedoms, social pressures and easy access to alcohol can lead some young adults to take risks that impact not just themselves, but everyone around them. In fact, **the first six weeks of a student's first year of college are especially vulnerable for risky and underage drinking.** That's why ongoing conversations

between you and your student are more important now than ever. It's **not just a one-time talk**—it's continuous, open communication that helps them make smart, safe choices throughout this important phase of their lives. Want to learn how to keep the conversation going and support your student's safe choices? [Click here](#) for tips and resources that can make all the difference.

## Teen Marijuana Use Raises Suicide Odds

Recent research has uncovered something hard to ignore: **teens who use marijuana face 46% higher odds of thinking about suicide and 85% higher odds of attempting it.** And this isn't just because they were already depressed—scientists controlled for that. The **data points straight to weed itself causing real mental health harm.** And that's on top of all the existing evidence linking it to disorders like schizophrenia. The takeaway? Prevention, prevention, prevention—especially for young people. This isn't just a public health warning. It's a matter of life and death.

Among teens, marijuana use is linked to a

**46%**

higher risk of  
suicidal ideation

**85%**

higher risk of  
attempting suicide

Maffre Mavet G, Somma C, Davisse-Paturet C, Akagiri G, Molchior M. The role of depression in the relationship between cannabis use and suicidal behaviours: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Drug Alcohol Depend.* 2025 Aug 1;273:112714. doi: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2025.112714. Epub 2025 May 16. PMID: 40424695.

**SAM** Smart  
Approaches to  
Marijuana  
preventing another big tobacco

# Suicide Data: Montana



Suicide is a public health problem and leading cause of death in the United States. Suicide can also be prevented – more investment in suicide prevention, education, and research will prevent the untimely deaths of thousands of Americans each year. Unless otherwise noted, this fact sheet reports 2023 data from the CDC, the most current verified data available at time of publication (May 2025).

## 8th leading cause of death in Montana

### 2nd leading

cause of death for ages 15-24

### 2nd leading

cause of death for ages 25-34

### 2nd leading

cause of death for ages 35-44

### 4th leading

cause of death for ages 45-54

### 7th leading

cause of death for ages 55-64

### 17th leading

cause of death for ages 65 and older

73% of communities did not have enough mental health providers to serve residents in 2023, according to federal guidelines.

Over **three times** as many people died by suicide than in alcohol related motor vehicle accidents in 2021.

The total deaths to suicide reflected a total of **6,026 years** of potential life lost (YPLL) before age 65.

83% of firearm deaths were suicides.

67% of all suicides were by firearms.

## Suicide Death Rates

|            | Number of Deaths by Suicide | Rate per 100,000 Population | State Rank |
|------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Montana    | 310                         | 26.67                       | 2          |
| Nationally | 49,316                      | 14.12                       |            |

See full list of citations at [afsp.org/statistics](https://afsp.org/statistics).

[afsp.org/statistics](https://afsp.org/statistics)



American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention

## Pouring Over the Legislation: What Passed, What Didn't

The Montana Alcohol Beverage Control Division's Legislative Lookback fact sheet serves as a valuable snapshot of new alcohol-related legislation. It includes a clear summary of all alcohol bills passed during the 2025 legislative session, along with their implementation timelines. Additionally, it highlights four key bills that did not pass, offering useful insight into legislative priorities and changes affecting the alcohol industry in Montana. [Click here to view the ABCD's fact sheet](#)

## Kratom Regulation Misses the Forest for the Trees



Lately, there's been talk about banning or scheduling 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), the most potent compound in Kratom. On paper, that might sound like a smart step toward harm reduction. But in reality, it misses the mark.

Here's why: Whole-leaf kratom is still totally legal and that gives users and manufacturers unrestricted access to mitragynine—the primary alkaloid in Kratom that can be

converted into 7-OH, either in the body or using simple extraction methods that are widely known in certain circles [1] [2].

In other words, even if 7-OH is banned, it's easy to get there from legal, over-the-counter Kratom powder. This isn't just theory—concentrated Kratom extracts are already on the market and they're often far more potent than what most people realize.

Just 10 mg of 7-OH can produce opioid effects similar to 50 mg of morphine[3]. With no limits on how much raw kratom someone can buy, we're basically handing out the ingredients for a powerful opioid—no prescription needed.

If lawmakers really want to reduce Kratom-related risks, they need to go beyond 7-OH and take a hard look at mitragynine and whole-plant Kratom. Because right now, we're regulating the tip of the iceberg and pretending the rest doesn't exist.

**65% of Montana high school students who vape report having felt sad or hopeless compared to 36% of students who do not vape.<sup>11</sup>**

**25% of Montana adults who use tobacco report having poor mental health compared to 14% of those who do not use tobacco.<sup>3</sup>**

While some people turn to tobacco to cope with stress, **nicotine use actually worsens symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.** In Montana, one in three high school students who use vapes report doing so because they feel anxious, stressed or depressed.

**Quitting tobacco can be especially difficult for those with behavioral health conditions**—only 23% of these individuals succeed in quitting, compared to 54% of those without such conditions. More than half of participants in Quit Now Montana report having a behavioral health condition.

Quitting can lead to reduced stress, improved mood and quality of life and a greater chance of maintaining sobriety. To support this, Quit Now Montana launched a specialized program offering coaching tailored to individuals with behavioral health challenges. Since its launch in 2022, over 750 people have enrolled.

Need help quitting? Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or visit [quitnowmontana.com](https://quitnowmontana.com).

Source: 2024 MTUUP Progress Report, pg. 20

## Benadryl: The Hidden Danger Lurking in Your Medicine Cabinet



You probably have Benadryl (or a similar med) sitting in your bathroom right now. It seems harmless—used for allergies, sleep even bug bites. But its active ingredient, **diphenhydramine**, is getting some seriously dangerous attention.

### The TikTok Trend That Turned Deadly

Teens have been taking high doses of Benadryl to hallucinate—yes, really. The so-called “**Benadryl Challenge**” has led to ER visits and even deaths. It's a disturbing trend with tragic outcomes.

### Benadryl Isn't Just in Your Medicine Cabinet

It's also showing up in illicit drug supplies, used to boost sedation or mask effects. Combined with other substances, it can be deadly. Just look at the recent case of **celebrity chef Anne Burrell**—her cause of death involved a mix of diphenhydramine, alcohol and amphetamines.

### Even Everyday Use Has Risks

Many people casually use Benadryl or microdose sleep aids like melatonin nightly. But regular use can mess with brain chemistry and increase long-term health risks.

### What You Can Do

- Use it sparingly and only as directed
- Talk to your kids about the risks of TikTok trends
- Rethink nightly use of OTC sleep meds
- Keep medications locked up and out of reach to prevent misuse

*Just because it's over-the-counter doesn't mean it's safe. Stay smart. Stay informed.*

**YOU MATTER**

**Text. Call. Chat.**

**988** SUICIDE & CRISIS  
LIFELINE

988 is a critical lifeline—not just for suicide—but for anyone navigating emotional or mental health distress. It's a judgment-free, confidential service, ready any hour, any day, whether you're in crisis yourself or reaching out on behalf of someone else. [Watch this short video to see how 988 is making a difference across Montana.](#)

## TIPS FOR TALKING TO MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS (11-14 Year Olds)

- Middle school is a key time to start or continue conversations about alcohol and drugs.
- Encourage your child to share dreams and explore positive interests (e.g., art, music, sports, clubs).
- Support self-confidence and help them manage stress; discuss how drugs can negatively impact them.
- Get to know your child's friends and observe their interactions to stay informed on trends and behaviors.
- Clearly communicate your rules about alcohol, smoking/vaping and drugs to your child and their friends.
- Talk through scenarios involving peer pressure and help them practice refusal phrases like "No thanks, it's not my thing."
- Let them know they can call you anytime to leave uncomfortable situations; agree on a discreet "code word" for help.
- Warn against buying pills or medicine on social media due to the risk of counterfeit and dangerous drugs.
- Address myths—explain that alcohol is also a harmful substance, not a "safe" alternative to other drugs.

For more information, go to Chapter 4 of [\*Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Substance Use Prevention\*](#).

## Marijuana Could Break Your Heart—Literally



Lately, the headlines about weed haven't been great—and not just for your brain. Turns out, marijuana is just as bad for your heart. Recent studies show that users have a **29% higher risk of major heart problems** and are **51% more likely to have had a heart attack**. Even scarier? In the hour after using weed, your risk of a heart attack **can shoot up by nearly 400%**. And it's not just from smoking—edibles and other forms still seem to mess with your blood vessels if you're a chronic user. Despite all this, a lot of people—including politicians and industry folks—keep repeating the idea that marijuana is totally safe and natural. But the science says

otherwise and it's about time we started paying attention, especially since both young and older Americans are using more than ever. Source: [Sabet, K., Newsweek, July 24, 2025.](#)

## 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 "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)

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## 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](mailto:bmorrison@allianceforyouth.org).

Listen to the **August 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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