

April's *What's Trending* covers the latest in youth well-being and community health in Montana, from why vaping can dull taste and carry hidden risks, to the rise of psychedelics and the dangers of new substances like Cyclorphine. It highlights the lifesaving impact of .05 DUI laws, examines tobacco use as a racial justice issue and shares strategies for parents delaying kids' smartphone and social media use. The issue also warns about online risks on apps like Venmo and celebrates the relaunch of ParentingMontana.org, offering expanded tools and support for families navigating substance use, digital safety and healthy development.

# what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

April 2026, Issue 4

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## Vaping Always Did Seem Fishy

Alarming new concerns about e-cigarettes were discovered—thanks to vaping zebrafish. [This article](#) dives into a strange but revealing study where researchers exposed zebrafish to e-cigarette vapor and found changes that raise new red flags about vaping. The fish showed shifts in their gut bacteria and behavior, even when the vapor contained no nicotine, poking holes in the idea that “nicotine-free” vaping is harmless. While scientists caution that zebrafish aren't people, they say the results suggest vaping may have under-the-radar health effects that we don't fully understand yet, a worrying takeaway as e-cigarette use continues to climb, especially among teens. [READ MORE.](#)

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## Alcohol Makes Your Brain Forget How to Communicate With Itself

A couple drinks might feel like social lubricant, but inside your skull the Wi-Fi is buffering. In a new study in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, researchers scanned brains at the legal driving limit and found alcohol boosts chatter between nearby brain regions while weakening long-distance communication. Picture neighborhoods gossiping while the highways between them shut down. That scrambled network helps explain why people with the same breathalyzer reading can feel very different levels of drunk and why a few drinks can blur your vision and coordination. [READ MORE.](#)

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## Cyclorphine & Fentanyl Mix

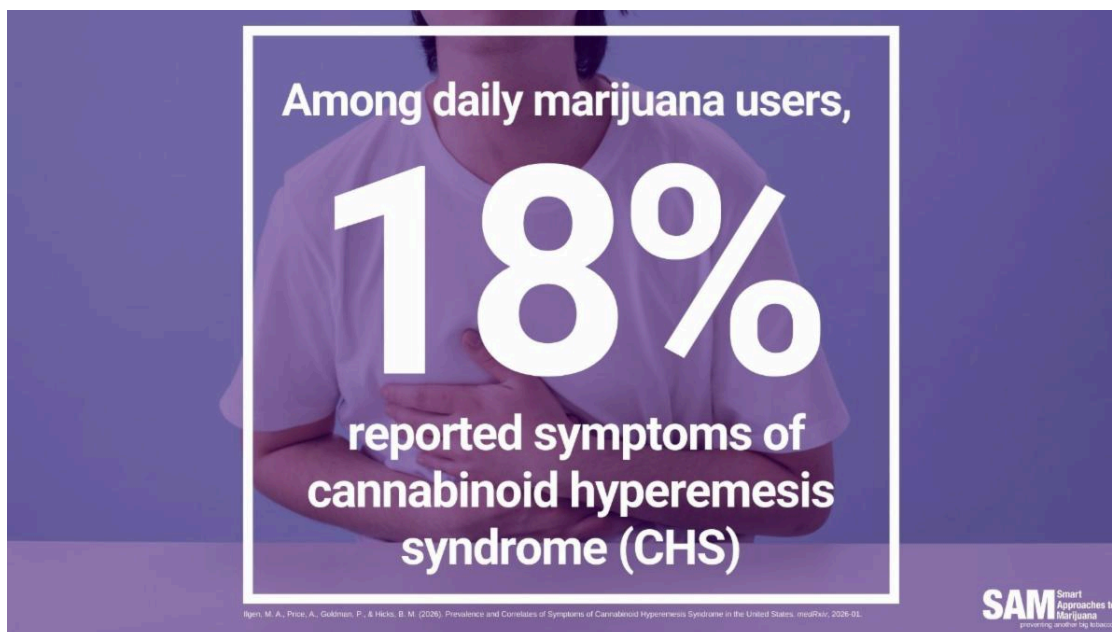
## Creates Deadly Gamble for Users

A dangerous new twist in the illegal drug scene is sending shockwaves through communities. Designers and dealers are cutting or mixing heroin, fentanyl and other synthetics with newly detected **opioids like cyclophosphamide**, creating unpredictable combinations that users have no way to measure or know until it's too late. These mixtures amplify overdose risk because **even experienced users can't guess potency** and the drugs often don't respond to reversal agents in the way single opioids do. Public health officials are warning that this ever-shifting supply makes every "hit" a gamble with life and underscores the urgency of harm-reduction tools like Narcan (naloxone) to prevent deaths. [READ MORE.](#)

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## From Microdoses to Magic Mushrooms: What's Trending in Psychedelics

Psilocybin and Amanita muscaria mushrooms are getting more attention and a recent NDEWS Weekly Briefing looks at how people in the US are using them. Using data from the [2025 RAND Psychedelics Survey](#) and the latest NDEWS reports, the briefing focuses on **microdosing, which is taking very small amounts instead of a full dose**. With more people curious and new products popping up—from microdosing kits to Amanita muscaria supplements—the briefing gives a clear, easy-to-understand look at these trends and what they might mean for public health. [READ MORE.](#)



Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome, also known as “**scromiting**,” i.e. “**scream-vomiting**,” is a serious and rising concern—and the data show it's increasingly common. Around 18% of daily weed users experience some form of it, [per a recent study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health](#). That translates to an estimated more than 7 million US adults—a national prevalence rate of close to 3%. The marijuana industry has assured vulnerable populations that marijuana is harmless, yet millions of Americans continue to be harmed by it.

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## .05 Saves Lives

There are a few states that have introduced legislation this year to lower their Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) Per Se limit to .05 for driving under the influence of alcohol, including Illinois. Illinois [HB4333](#) has completed its first reading and was referred to the Rules Committee in

January. Utah is currently the only state to have successfully lowered its per se limit to .05. The National Transportation Safety Board recommends that ALL states, DC and Puerto Rico establish a per se blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit of .05 or lower for all drivers.

According to their [.05 BAC Safety Briefing Facts](#) infographic for drivers with BACs of .05–.079 g/dL, the risk of being in a single-vehicle fatal crash was at least 7 times higher than for drivers with no alcohol in their system. ([Fell and Voas 2014](#)) They also discuss the effects of the 2018 Utah .05 BAC law, as reported by NHTSA's evaluation. ([Thomas et al., 2022](#)):

- A **19.8% reduction in the fatal crash rate** between 2016 and 2019
- More than **1 in 5 drinkers changed their behaviors**, such as planning alternative transportation when drinking away from home
- **No decrease in alcohol sales, alcohol consumption or tourism revenue**
- **No marked increase in DUI arrests**

*Courtesy: Alcohol Policy Resource Center, February newsletter*

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## Parents Find Support in Delaying Kids' Use of Smartphones, Social Media

More and more parents are discovering they don't have to navigate the smartphone and social media maze alone. From school programs to community groups, families are finding support and practical tips to help kids use devices later—and more responsibly. Experts are now looking beyond just screen-time limits, focusing on healthy habits, online safety and real-world connections. [Click to watch](#) this eye-opening CBS News story and see how parents across the country are finding guidance and confidence in managing tech for their kids. [CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BALANCE PROJECT.](#)

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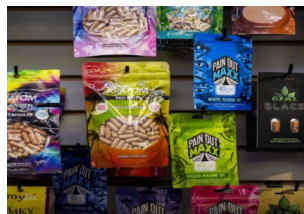
## Did you know this is happening on Venmo?

Kids are navigating the online world in ways a lot of parents don't even realize. What looks harmless—like a popular game or a regular payment app—can actually be misused if privacy settings aren't set right. Using real-life examples, this conversation dives into practical ways families can stay safer: setting limits on devices, spotting risks before they become problems and keeping up with the ever-changing digital world. It's all about awareness, prevention and why parents being involved matters now more than ever. [Click here to listen.](#)

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## Community Warning: Kratom Products

These products look like snacks, energy drinks or herbal supplements—but Kratom can affect the brain the same way strong prescription pain medicine does. These items are being sold in gas stations and vape shops where teens shop everyday.



Many teens don't realize Kratom is a mind-altering substance. The packaging is colorful, trendy and often designed to blend in with everyday drinks and gummies.

**WHAT IS KRATOM?** Kratom comes from the leaves of a Southeast Asian tree. It can create stimulant effects at low doses and strong painkiller-like effects at higher doses—including drowsiness, confusion and dependence.

### WHY IT CONCERNS PARENTS

- Packaging looks harmless—bright bags, candy colors and fruit flavors
- Products vary in strength—labels may not match what's inside
- Kratom can lead to strong dependence and difficult withdrawal



### SIGNS YOUR TEEN MAY BE USING KRATOM

- Very small pupils
- Sudden fatigue or trouble staying awake
- Sweating, shaking, irritability
- Hidden packets labeled 'Kratom,' 'maeng da' or brightly colored drinks

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Check local stores**—Kratom is often placed near candy, vapes or energy drinks
- **Inspect** backpacks, glove compartments, drawers and trash bins
- **Have a calm conversation:** "These look harmless, but they can affect your brain like strong pain medicine. I want you safe."
- **Emergency:** Trouble staying awake or slowed breathing → Call 911
- **Poison Control:** 1-800-222-1222

Courtesy: [MothersAgainstHerbalAbuse.org/Kratom](https://MothersAgainstHerbalAbuse.org/Kratom)

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## When Vaping Makes Everything Taste Like Nothing

It starts with a strange complaint that sounds almost harmless, until you realize what it might be signaling. More and more people who vape are suddenly losing their sense of taste, sometimes beyond just their favorite flavors. The phenomenon, known as "**vape tongue**," has users reporting dulled or vanished taste and smell, and experts suggest it could be tied to how vaping alters oral health and mouth bacteria. What begins as a minor annoyance may hint at deeper effects on the body, adding another unsettling question mark to the growing list of concerns around e-cigarettes and making this an issue worth a closer look. [READ MORE.](#)

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## High School Highs, Adult Woes: Early Marijuana Use Tied to Psychosis

Teens who light up early might be rolling the dice with their mental health. A huge new study tracked nearly half a million U.S. adolescents and found that **early cannabis use roughly doubles the risk of developing serious conditions like psychosis or bipolar disorder** later on. This risk is hard to ignore. [READ MORE.](#)

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ParentingMontana.org

# PARENTING MONTANA

TOOLS FOR YOUR CHILD'S SUCCESS

*Relaunches with New Design & Expanded Tools to Support Montana Families*

## Why Tobacco is a Racial Justice Issue

The tobacco industry's long-standing predatory tactics aren't just about selling a product—they're deeply entwined with America's history of racism and unequal health outcomes. By deliberately targeting Black communities with menthol cigarettes, saturating minority neighborhoods with advertising and creating barriers to quitting, tobacco use has become both a public health crisis and a racial justice issue. Community-driven solutions and policy changes are now working to reverse decades of harm, as highlighted in [research from The Truth Initiative](#).





- Holiday (NW side of town)
- Kernaghan's Pik-N-Pump
- Love's Travel Stop
- Meadow Lark Country Club
- Nomad Glass & Healing
- Noon's (2 locations)
- On Your Way Conoco (Fox Farm)
- Side Track Lounge
- The Vape Shop
- Town Pump (2 locations)

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## 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.](#)
- **Retailer selling illegal vapes?** - Take Action. File a report by [CLICKING HERE.](#)



**Businesses must post clear signage at every public entrance** stating that smoking, vaping or marijuana use is not allowed.

**Order FREE signs here:**

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

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CASCADE COUNTY  
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SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
PREVENTION ALLIANCE

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When I was a kid, I watched my grandpa slowly lose his fight with lung cancer. One day, I sat with him while my mom stepped out. He started to cough and then – what came up was something I'll never forget. I held a bin to help him, wiped his mouth and he looked at me with eyes that had seen too much. Then he said just three words: 'Don't ever smoke.' Those words have stayed with me my whole life. And they apply to more than cigarettes – vaping, too. Inhaling chemicals into your lungs, even if it seems harmless, can bring real damage, real regret, real pain. You don't have to learn the hard way. Every choice to stay away from dangerous substances is a choice for your health, your breath, your future. Protect yourself – you're worth it.

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