

Inside this issue of *What's Trending*: Gen Z's shifting relationship with alcohol, the rise of Recovery High Schools, why THC-impaired driving isn't the same as drunk driving, the strange appeal of "Shrekking" in Gen Z dating, the case for a marijuana tolerance break and more.

# what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

February 2026, Issue 2

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## She thought it was just another energy drink. It took half her bodyweight and sent her to rehab.

What began as a quest for a morning boost has turned into a dangerous addiction for many Americans who saw **Kratom drinks** as safe wellness products. Sold in gas stations with appealing labels, users often escalate from one drink to ten, facing severe health effects and harsh withdrawals. Experts warn **even those with no prior substance use can become dependent** and concentrated formulations make addiction faster. While FDA action and lawsuits are emerging, families are already suffering, treatment demand is rising and recovery, though possible, is slow—showing how “wellness” products can hide serious risks. [READ MORE.](#)

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## Children are getting their hands on nicotine pouches & fainting

Eye-catching packs and sweet flavors are putting nicotine pouches into the hands of children — and experts are sounding the alarm. With no legal age restriction on sales in the UK, colorful, candy-like nicotine pouches that mimic sweets are being sold openly in shops, raising fears that **kids are experimenting with addictive nicotine** and exposing a regulatory gap that lawmakers are scrambling to close. As awareness among 11- to 17-year-olds climbs and health advocates push for urgent action, the issue has become a growing concern for parents, teachers and public health officials alike. [READ MORE.](#)

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## Gen Z is Drinking More Alcohol

Gen Z's (13- to 28-year-olds) reputation as the generation that rejected booze in favor of wellness is starting to rewrite itself, as a new global survey shows **young adults are drinking more alcohol and now mirror older generations in consumption habits** — especially in the

US, where reported drinking jumped sharply in just two years — with spirits, bars and social outings back on the menu; but analysts say the trend is nuanced, blending moderation with a renewed interest in shared experiences and choice of drinks. [READ MORE.](#)

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## Beyond the Diploma: Teens Fighting Addiction Together in a Recovery School

At Denver's 5280 High School, the morning bell doesn't just signal the start of class — it kicks off a raw, unfiltered journey of recovery, resilience and reinvention for teens who've battled everything from fentanyl to meth and alcohol. Inside one of America's largest recovery high schools, students lean on one another, guided by coaches who've walked the same path, as they fight for sobriety, purpose and a chance to finish their diplomas. From a senior who once only showed up to score drugs to a young dad turning his life around while raising his infant son, this Nightline-followed story captures heartbreak and hope in equal measure — and shows how a school can become a lifeline when it feels like there's nothing left to hold onto. [READ MORE.](#)

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## Starting Young, Paying Later: How Teen Marijuana Use Can Shape Adulthood

Curious how teenage cannabis use might shape a young person's future beyond the momentary buzz? A major new study tracked thousands of kids from early adolescence into young adulthood and found that those who start using weed before age 15 and continue regularly are more likely to **face mental and physical health struggles later in life**, even after accounting for other risk factors. With expert insights into brain development and long-term health, this piece unpacks what early pot use could mean for teens, their families and those who care about youth well-being. [Click here to take the Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test.](#)

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## Kratom & the Cost of Uncertainty: Montana's Place in a Broken Regulatory System

Montana sits in a regulatory no-man's-land on Kratom while the rest of the country wrestles with how to handle this controversial plant with stimulant and opioid-like effects. In *On Kratom, or The Fractured Regulation of Unscheduled Drugs*, the Rockefeller Institute unpacks how federal agencies and many states are scrambling to restrict or ban Kratom and its potent derivatives, yet **Montana currently has no statewide bans, age limits or formal restrictions in place**, leaving Kratom products freely available even as public health officials sound alarms about safety and oversight. [READ MORE.](#)

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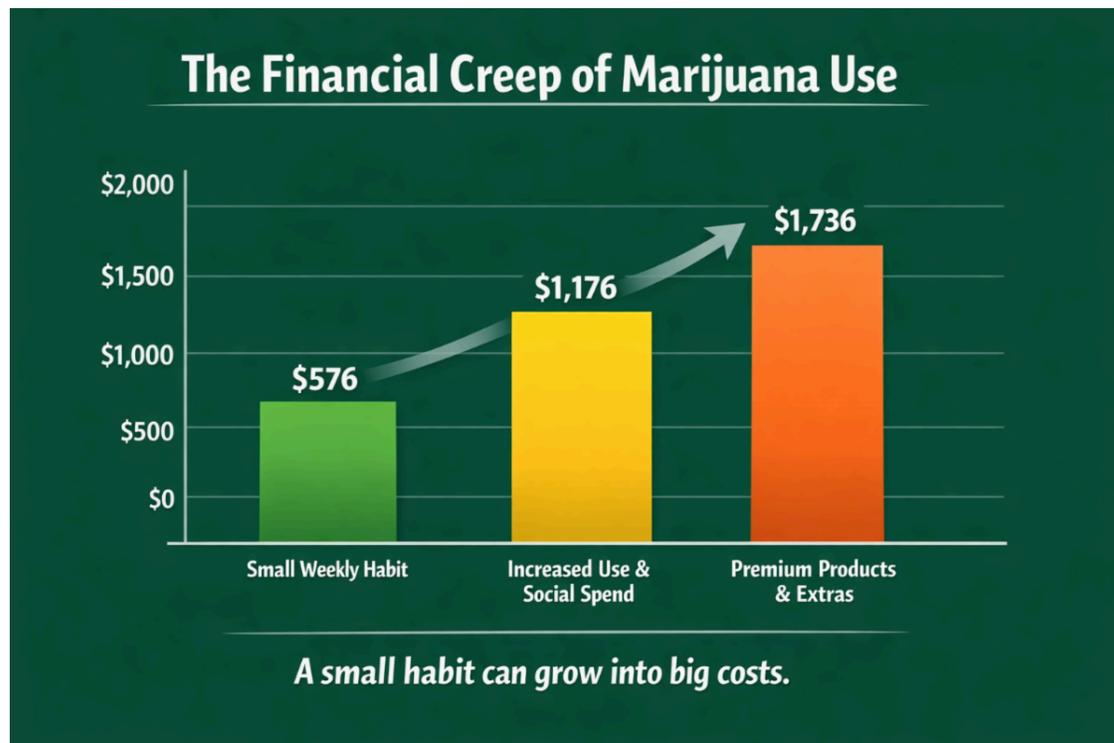
## THC-Impaired Driving Is Not the Same as Drunk Driving — and Treating It Like It Is Costs Lives

Marijuana's march into mainstream life has outpaced science and safety, and the result is tragic. Families across the United States are losing loved ones in crashes tied to THC-impaired driving, yet policy still treats cannabis the same as alcohol even though THC affects the body very differently and can't be measured like blood alcohol levels, with current enforcement tools failing to accurately detect real impairment, leaving dangerous gaps in education and legislation that cost lives and demand urgent reform. [READ MORE.](#)

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# What is Shrekking in Gen Z Dating?

A bizarre new dating trend called “Shrekking” is sweeping social media, where people deliberately **choose partners they consider less attractive in the hope of scoring loyalty and affection**. Experts and commentators in the piece argue this strategy is rooted in fear of vulnerability and **can backfire because physical appearance doesn’t predict character or treatment**, meaning you can still end up hurt or disappointed even when you think you’ve engineered an “advantage” in the relationship. The article explores how this trend reflects deeper anxieties in modern dating and encourages readers to focus on genuine compatibility rather than defensive tactics that may ultimately reinforce insecurity rather than resolve it. [READ MORE.](#)



## A Pause That Pays Off: Understanding Marijuana Tolerance Breaks

A tolerance break, often called a **T-break**, is an **intentional pause from marijuana use**. People take tolerance breaks for many reasons, from saving money to improving mental clarity. Regardless of the motivation, **even short breaks can offer meaningful benefits and useful insight into one’s relationship with cannabis**.

### Benefits of Tolerance Breaks

One of the most common benefits is reduced tolerance. Regular cannabis use, especially products high in THC, can make the body less responsive over time. **A break allows the endocannabinoid system to rebalance**, meaning lower amounts may be needed if use resumes.

Tolerance breaks can also **support mental and physical well-being**. Many people report clearer thinking, improved memory, better sleep quality, increased motivation and more stable mood after taking a break. For some, anxiety, brain fog or fatigue become easier to manage.

Another key benefit is **greater self-awareness**. Stepping away from use creates space to notice habits, triggers and reasons for using cannabis. This awareness can help people make more intentional choices about future use.

Finally, **tolerance breaks can reinforce a sense of control.** Successfully completing a break often builds confidence and shows that use is a choice rather than a requirement.

### What to Check For During a Tolerance Break

While on a tolerance break, it can be helpful to check in with a few areas:

- **Physical changes:** Notice sleep patterns, appetite, energy levels and any temporary withdrawal-like effects such as irritability or restlessness.
- **Emotional shifts:** Pay attention to mood, stress levels, anxiety or emotional regulation without cannabis.
- **Cravings and triggers:** Observe when cravings show up, what situations increase them and how they are managed.
- **Daily functioning:** Check productivity, focus, motivation and engagement in work, school or relationships.
- **Reasons for use:** Reflect on what role cannabis plays and whether those needs are being met in other ways.

**Tolerance breaks are not about judgment or punishment. They are a practical tool for learning, recalibrating and supporting healthier, more intentional choices around cannabis use.**

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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.](#)



**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://mthspromotions.rocsoft.com/public/login>  
(Quick account setup required)

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Thank you for reading What's Trending these past four years. I imagined these emails as tiny paper boats floating into the great digital ocean, destined for unknown shores. Some of you picked them up, read them, forwarded them, perhaps even loved them. During legislative season, these boats sometimes turned into lifeboats or maybe just paper planes caught in a storm of alerts and deadlines. To all of you, I owe a nod, a wink, a thank-you that stretches longer than these sentences and possibly a small parade in an alternate universe where everyone reads emails on a giant floating screen while riding unicorns. B

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