

This month's issue of What's Trending covers three new vapes raising health concerns, how to report illegal vapes, a DEA warning about nitazenes and bromazolam, why experts say kids shouldn't have smartphones before age 16 and more current topics to help keep families informed and safe.

what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

January 2026, Issue 1

Talking about stress is often the first step to feeling better. When worries stay in your head they can grow, but sharing them with a family member, friend, colleague or your primary care doctor can bring quick relief. If you prefer to talk with someone outside your circle, counseling is a strong option. [Beyond the Weather](#) is a community-led movement to normalize conversations relating to mental health in rural communities through honest conversations and a sense of humor.



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Frontier Psychiatry

3 new vapes raise health concerns



Three new vape products are on the market, potentially exacerbating public health concerns. Vaping can increase health risks among users for COPD, sleep problems, impulsivity, mood disorders, damaged smile, anhedonia and use of other drugs. Here are three new vapes:

1. Replaceable cartridges that contain flavor.

The federal government banned flavors in vaping devices that could be refilled. So some vape companies turned to “disposable” vapes, filling them not only with exotic flavors but also 50,000 puffs or more. When they are empty, they are to be disposed. Now, Geek Bar and other companies have replaceable cartridges with nicotine plus flavors like Banana Vanilla, Vanilla Cheesecake and Watermelon Bubblegum. Cartridges retail for \$18.99.

2. Vapes that make calls and texts.

Vape companies are offering devices that can pair with a mobile phone and make calls, texts, take photos and find the phone. An example is the Vookbar. People can buy these for \$13.99. “That’s easily affordable for the average kid with a babysitting job,” said UW-CTRI Director Dr. Hasmeena Kathuria. “And, as a pulmonologist, I’m concerned whenever people are inhaling chemicals, and I’ve treated patients who use these products. This is a serious public health issue.”

3. Vapes that look like snow cones.

Vape companies claim not to market to kids, but this vape device resembles a snow cone that’s popular with children. SnowWolf offers two versions – one without nicotine and one with. It sells for less than 10 bucks and comes in a variety of flavors such as Blue Cotton Candy and Apple Blue Razz.

While the FDA has not approved these products for sale, they are widely available online.

UW Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention, News Update, December 2025.

Retailers Selling Illegal Vapes? Speak Up

Protecting young people from the dangers of nicotine starts with holding retailers accountable. Federal law makes it illegal to sell any tobacco product, including e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches, to anyone under 21.

Right now, **only 39 e-cigarette products are authorized for sale** in the United States and every one of them comes from **just four brands: JUUL, Logic, NJOY or Vuse. Any other vape product on the market is illegal**, yet many stores continue to sell them, putting youth at risk and undermining community health.

If you **see a retailer selling unauthorized vape products** or selling any tobacco products to minors, you can **take action**. Report the violation directly to the FDA using their online reporting system. Your report helps stop illegal sales, reduces youth access to addictive products and supports a healthier community. Here is the link to file a report:

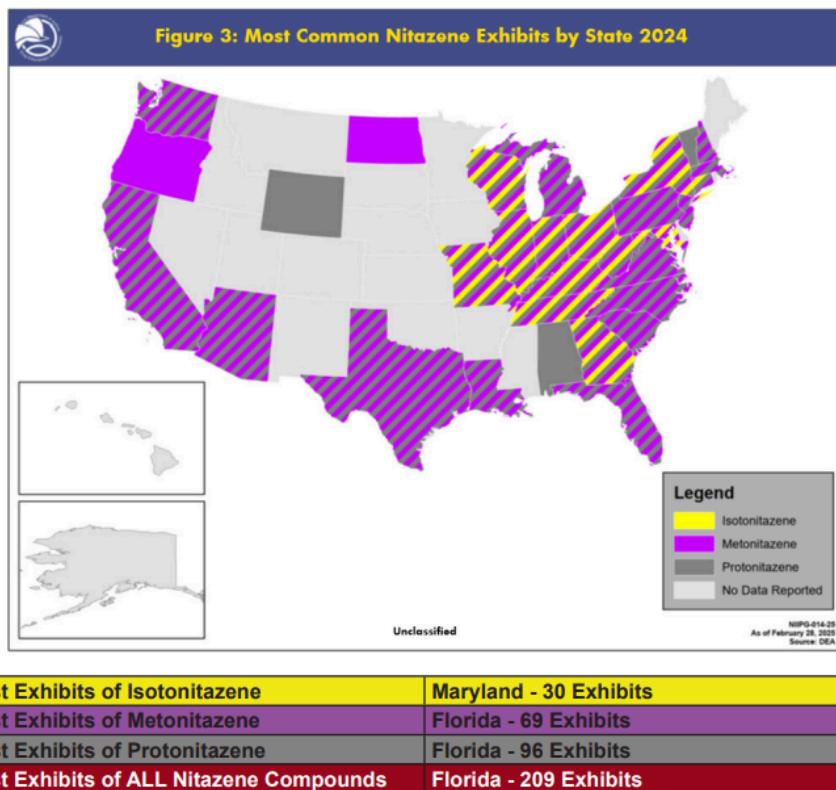
<https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/ptvr/index.cfm>

College Move-in Day Became Rehab Intake Day

On the day he was supposed to move into his college dorm, one 18-year-old found himself checking into rehab instead—after getting hooked on a potent new drug called **7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), a synthetic derivative of Kratom** widely sold at gas stations

and smoke shops. Dubbed “gas-station heroin” for its **opioid-like** strength, 7-OH is estimated to be **14-22 times stronger than morphine** and is surging among young users, often with devastating consequences. Regulators and public-health officials are now scrambling to crack down even as users, parents and policymakers debate whether regulation or prohibition is the best fix—and how to respond while the **next wave of the opioid crisis may already be here**. [READ MORE](#).

The Next Fentanyl Threat Is Knocking — and Most People Don’t Know Its Name Yet



The DEA is warning about **Nitazenes**, a newer group of **synthetic opioids** that can be just as **strong as Fentanyl or even stronger**. They’re showing up in drug supplies more often, usually mixed with Fentanyl, which makes overdoses even more likely. The problem is you can’t tell they’re there without lab testing, so people have no idea what they’re actually taking. They’re still far less common than Fentanyl, but more than 1,000 cases have turned up since 2020, mostly from small shipments coming in from China. The DEA has identified 19 different versions so far, with a few showing up the most. **This hasn’t hit Montana yet, but since we tend to be about three years behind national trends, it’s coming our way and now is the time to be aware.** [READ MORE](#).

When Fake Xanax Turns Deadly: The Bromazolam Twist

Bromazolam is another drug of concern to the DEA along with Nitazines. It has emerged as a significant threat because it’s being used as the active ingredient in counterfeit Xanax tablets entering the U.S. drug supply. Many of these pills are produced using chemicals purchased from foreign websites that cater to illicit pill-press operations.

Bromazolam is also showing up as an adulterant in Fentanyl. This combination greatly increases overdose risk because people often don’t know they’re taking a benzodiazepine with an opioid. Naloxone can reverse the opioid effects of Fentanyl but it cannot counteract the respiratory depression caused by benzodiazepines. As a result polysubstance overdoses involving Bromazolam are harder to treat and more likely to become fatal. [READ MORE](#).

Kava: How Did an Old Remedy Become Tied to Street-Level Drug Use?

Kava has been used for generations as a calming, traditional drink, but it's now showing up in liquor stores, smoke shops and even mixed into trendy products alongside substances like Kratom and Tianeptine. Because it's easy to miss on labels and doesn't show up on standard drug tests, Kava is sliding under the radar while being paired with stronger emerging drugs. Curious why this old-school plant is suddenly part of street-level trends? [Read the full article](#) to see what's driving its rise.

Marijuana Is Too Strong Now

As weed has become easier to obtain, it has become harder to smoke.

It's striking how marijuana, once mostly associated with relaxation and enjoyment, now seems to affect even seasoned users in unsettling ways. Across the board, people are reporting **heightened anxiety, paranoia and a sense of being overwhelmed**, largely because today's strains are far more potent than those of previous decades. What used to be a casual, recreational experience can now feel intense and disorienting, leaving many to reconsider how — or even whether — they want to use it. [READ MORE](#).

The World Through Their Eyes



Check out this quick, free film from the Chippewa Valley Coalition (MI) — **under 3 minutes!** It shows how kids and teens are **surrounded by messages that make alcohol, marijuana, vaping and other drugs look “harmless”** — from social media and billboards to stores, TV shows, movies and music. Parents, teachers and community members, this one's for you: <https://vimeo.com/1132102185>



While using **marijuana** before **driving** is known to increase the risk of a crash, most **Montana** drivers—**94%**, in fact—report that they **never** **drive under the influence.**

The Nightcap Trap: How Using Alcohol or Cannabis to Drift Off Hurts Rest

More than one in five young adults are turning to cannabis or alcohol to help them fall asleep — but new research from the University of Michigan suggests that strategy could be backfiring. Instead of improving rest, using these substances may actually worsen sleep quality, fragmenting

your sleep and raising the risk of long-term dependence. Want to know how widespread the habit is and what experts are saying? [Click here to read more.](#)



Why Officer Gomez says NO to Smartphones before 16

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

Missed the December edition of What's Trending?

[Click here](#) to listen to a short podcast with all the highlights on KGPR, sponsored by Great Falls–Cascade County Crimestoppers.

What's Trending?

A look at drug and alcohol trends happening
in Great Falls and Cascade County



*Cascade County Substance Abuse Prevention Alliance
Alliance for Youth
Great Falls/Cascade County Crimestoppers*

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SUBSTANCE ABUSE
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I grew up watching All in the Family. Meathead was my favorite, although Edith rushing through the house always made me laugh. Rob Reiner gave Michael "Meathead" Stivic a conscience that never felt preachy, just human. He questioned, he cared and he believed people could do better. That moral compass stayed with me long after the TV was turned off. Reiner lived those values beyond the screen and I am grateful for how his work helped shape the way I see the world. Some lessons arrive quietly, sit with you for a lifetime and keep you moving forward when the work feels heavy. -B

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