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what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

July 2026, Issue 7

Recent Great Falls Retail Scan Reveals Circle K No Longer Sells Kratom Nationwide

Our recent retail environmental scan has completed our annual review cycle. We will resume scanning efforts again in late summer or early fall. One notable finding was that Circle K appears to have made a corporate-level decision to discontinue Kratom sales. Illegal vape products and other concerns were identified at several retailers and follow-up actions are underway. **Anyone interested in participating in future scans** and learning a thing or two about retail alcohol, tobacco, vape and Kratom sales is encouraged to contact CascadeCountySAPA@gmail.com. Fair warning—**you will never look at a convenience store the same way again.** [Click to read the full report.](#)

Why Today's Drug Landscape Demands a New Approach from Employers

For business owners, managers and organizational leaders, keeping up with today's drug landscape is **no longer just a health issue—it's a workplace issue.** The substances affecting employees and communities are changing rapidly, with synthetic drugs, counterfeit pills and increasingly potent combinations creating risks that are more difficult to recognize and address.

What may appear to be a familiar problem can now **carry far greater consequences for safety, productivity and employee wellbeing.** Understanding these evolving trends helps leaders

make informed decisions, strengthen workplace policies and create environments where employees can thrive while reducing risk for the organization as a whole.

In her article [Old Drugs, New Threats®: The Evolving Drug Landscape](#), Melissa Moore, Certified Prevention Specialist and Owner & Trainer of [M3 Consulting LLC](#), explores how the drug landscape continues to evolve and what leaders need to know to stay informed, and be prepared and proactive.

Gambling Disorder & Substance Use Disorder: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Gambling disorder holds a unique place in modern psychiatry because it's the only behavioral addiction currently included alongside substance addictions in the DSM-5. That distinction reflects a growing understanding that **addiction isn't just about chemicals or substances**—it's also about how repeated behaviors affect the brain's reward system, decision-making and emotional regulation. And that's where the clinical conversation becomes especially important. When you look at gambling disorder and co-occurring substance use disorders (SUDs), the overlap becomes hard to ignore. [READ MORE.](#)

Alcohol is Killing Americans: Society Looks the Other Way

Alcohol is a drug that **kills nearly 500 Americans every day** and causes more deaths in a typical year than every infectious disease combined. It is manufactured abroad and domestically, then sold by powerful multinational organizations with a vast network of distributors. Its promoters often appear indifferent to its addictive and ruinous properties.

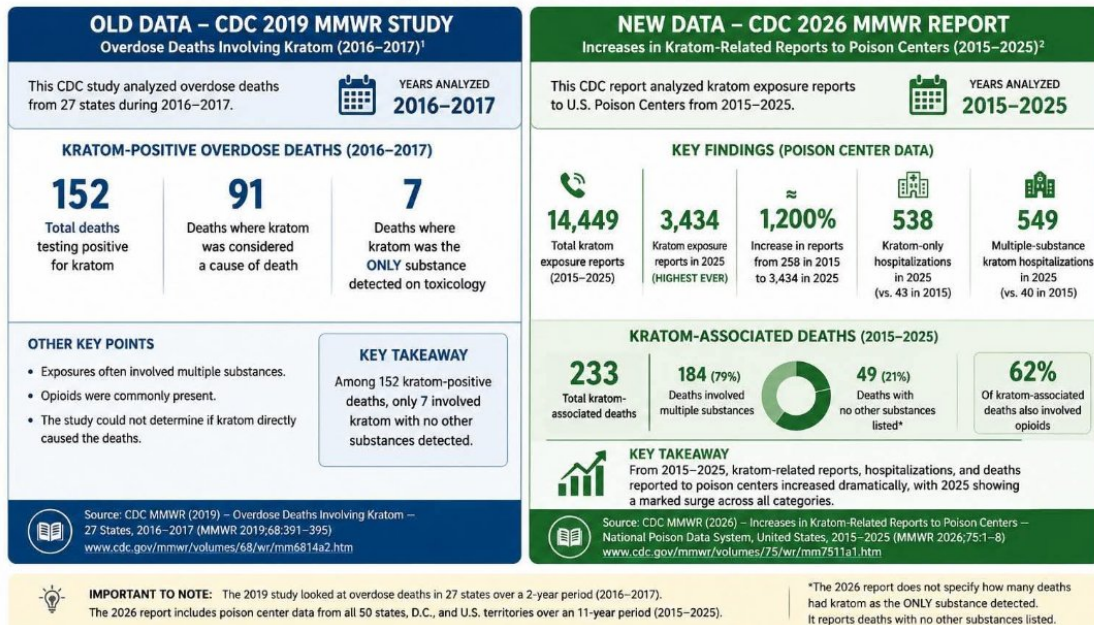
For decades — **for centuries, really** — it has destroyed lives, torn apart families, stunted the economy and caused millions of deaths. Yet alcohol, by far the most popular and most harmful mind-altering substance in the U.S., is not seen as a public health emergency. [READ MORE.](#)

The Overlooked Link Between Menopause & Addiction

Menopause is increasingly being recognized as an important — and often overlooked — factor in substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery. SAMHSA highlights how **hormonal changes during midlife can affect mood, sleep, stress, anxiety and overall mental health, sometimes leading women to increase alcohol or substance use as a way to cope**. At the same time, **menopause symptoms can make recovery and treatment more difficult**, especially when providers don't recognize the connection. [The article](#) calls for more menopause-informed care, better screening and stronger collaboration between behavioral health and women's health providers so women in midlife receive support that addresses the full picture of their health and recovery needs. [READ MORE.](#)

CDC KRATOM DATA: OLD (2016–2017) vs NEW (2015–2025)

Comparing CDC Findings from the 2019 MMWR Study and the 2026 MMWR Report



1. CDC MMWR 2019;68:391–395
2. CDC MMWR 2026;75:1–8

Montana Releases Updated Information on Kratom & Emerging 7-OH Products

The Montana Injury Prevention Program recently released a [Kratom fact sheet](#) that provides general information on Kratom and related substances such as 7-OH, along with Montana-specific data on Kratom-related morbidity and mortality. **Montana data** on Kratom remains limited, but available information indicates there were **45 deaths between 2019 and 2024** in which Kratom was detected in a person's system. Understanding the impact of Kratom use in Montana is often complicated by the concurrent use of additional substances.

Kratom is derived from the leaves of the tropical tree *Mitragyna speciosa* and is used for a variety of purposes, including pain relief, management of opioid withdrawal symptoms and recreational use. Research suggests Kratom acts on mu-opioid receptors in the brain, producing effects similar to opioids. Synthesized extracts of a Kratom alkaloid commonly known as 7-OH are considered more potent and may more closely resemble opioid effects, potentially increasing the risk of dependence and overdose, although research on 7-OH is still emerging. [READ MORE.](#)

In Rural Montana, Distance Can Be the Biggest Emergency

The image of a **Montana Highway Patrol** trooper taking a ferry across the Missouri River to reach a child trapped in farm equipment sounds unbelievable — but in Montana, it's reality. In this case, taking the **Virgelle Ferry** cut nearly an hour off the response time during a life-threatening emergency.

What stands out most is not just the dedication of first responders, but the geography they're forced to overcome just to deliver emergency care. **In large parts of Montana, help is not minutes away.** It can mean rivers, gravel roads, mountain passes and vast stretches of ranchland separating families from medical attention.

This particular rescue required coordination between local fire departments, search and rescue teams, ambulance crews, law enforcement and Mercy Flight. That kind of **teamwork is common in rural Montana because it has to be.**

This story is a reminder that access to healthcare in Montana is about more than hospitals or insurance. For many rural families, the biggest barrier is simply distance — and when every minute matters, that distance can change everything. [READ MORE.](#)

Flavored, Hidden, Addictive: The Weight-Loss Trend Parents Should Know About

There is growing concern that some adolescents and young adults — particularly girls and young women — are using nicotine pouches like Zyn for appetite suppression and weight control. Social media trends have promoted Zyn as “gas station Ozempic” or “O-Zyn-Pic” and studies continue to show links between body image concerns, dieting behaviors and nicotine use among youth, especially females.

Experts are concerned because nicotine pouches are easy to hide, flavored and discreet to use at school or in public. While marketed as safer than cigarettes, they still carry significant risks for youth, including nicotine addiction, anxiety, cardiovascular effects, impacts on brain development and potential worsening of eating disorder behaviors. **Some nicotine pouches contain up to 30 mg of nicotine each — roughly the amount of nicotine absorbed from an entire pack of cigarettes** — making them especially concerning for adolescents with developing brains. [READ MORE.](#)

Yellowstone County Sues Businesses Over Kratom Sales

A growing legal battle over Kratom is unfolding in Yellowstone County, where local health officials have taken the unusual step of suing businesses that continue to sell the controversial substance. Supporters argue Kratom helps people manage pain and avoid more dangerous drugs, while health authorities point to FDA warnings about serious health risks and insist existing food safety laws leave them no choice. With business owners questioning why the product remains legal elsewhere in Montana and state lawmakers still debating how it should be regulated, the dispute is raising bigger questions about public health, consumer choice and who gets to decide what products can be sold. Read the full story to learn why this fight could have implications far beyond Billings. [READ MORE.](#)

Prevention Efforts Need to Cut Across Generations

In April, SAMHSA published [Prevention Across the Lifespan: Spotlight on Older Adults.](#)

This resource highlights the rising rates and unique risks of substance use among older adults, while exploring key risk and protective factors and opportunities for prevention—including screening, education and medication management.

An important reminder that prevention isn’t just about youth—it’s truly lifelong.

This information courtesy of Melissa Moore with [M3 Consulting](#) and her amazing weekly newsletter, *The Activator*.

“There’s no such thing as a safe vape.”

A Cleveland Clinic article says that while nicotine-free vapes may sound safer, they still aren’t harmless. Vaping can expose your lungs to chemicals, flavorings and other substances that may cause irritation or damage. **Even without nicotine, vapes can contain volatile organic compounds that may damage your lungs and enter your bloodstream.** The article also notes

that some products labeled “nicotine-free” have actually been found to contain nicotine. Experts say there’s still a lot we don’t know about the long-term effects of vaping, so nicotine-free options shouldn’t be considered completely safe. [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.](#)
- **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://mthhs promotions.rocsoft.com/public/login>
(Quick account setup required)



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