

May's *What's Trending* highlights today's shifting drug landscape: cannabis vs. alcohol safety is more complex than it appears, Fentanyl test strips offer helpful but limited protection and Iceland's prevention model shows the power of healthy alternatives for youth. At the same time, new concerns are emerging—from vaping risks to pets and school plumbing issues to the internet fueling drug access—while Kratom-related poison calls are surging, underscoring growing and often hidden dangers.

what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

May 2026, Issue 5

Kratom Ban at Malmstrom Part of Broader DoD Policy

A February 2026 announcement at Malmstrom Air Force Base (MAFB) has drawn attention to a growing issue: Kratom is prohibited and leadership is actively reinforcing that message.

While some have viewed this as a new, base-specific crackdown, it is actually part of a much larger policy. The Malmstrom communication reflects a Department of Defense (DoD)–wide ban that applies to all branches of the U.S. military.

Malmstrom's Announcement

The 341st Missile Wing recently emphasized that Airmen are prohibited from the use, possession, distribution or manufacture of Kratom. Officials also noted the substance can appear in many forms—capsules, edibles and drinks—making it easy to encounter. This is not a new rule, but it signals that MAFB leadership is actively communicating and enforcing the policy.

A DoD-Wide Policy

The broader ban stems from a [September 2025 DoD directive](#), which took effect December 31, 2025. It prohibits Kratom and its active compounds for all service members, regardless of civilian legality.

Under the policy:

- Kratom is banned in all forms
- It is prohibited across all branches
- Violations may result in action under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)

The DoD cites concerns over health risks, readiness and opioid-like effects as the basis for the ban.

Montana School Bus Incident Sparks Probe

After 6-Year-Old Reportedly Vapes

Authorities in Yellowstone County are investigating after a Shepherd mother reported that a 6-year-old brought a vape device onto a school bus, used it and shared it with other students, including her child. The mother said she alerted the school, which was initially unaware of the incident, and the case was then referred to law enforcement. A guardian was briefly cited for child endangerment, though the charge was later dropped as prosecutors review the situation, while officials continue to investigate and parents raise concerns about vaping reaching very young children. [READ MORE.](#)

Is Cannabis Safer Than Alcohol? The Truth Might Surprise You.

It's a question we hear everywhere—and the answer isn't as simple as many headlines suggest.

In this new article, [Every Brain Matters](#) challenges the common belief that cannabis is the “safer” choice. While alcohol is linked to well-known harms like disease, addiction and thousands of deaths each year, cannabis carries its own serious risks—many of which are often overlooked or misunderstood.

From mental health impacts like psychosis to increased risks of heart attack and stroke, the article highlights how today's high-potency THC products can affect the brain and body in ways that differ—but are not necessarily safer—than alcohol.

Perhaps most importantly, it challenges the comparison itself. These are two very different substances with different risks and framing one as “safe” can create a false sense of security—especially for young people and developing brains.

[Read the full article to explore the science, myths and what families need to know.](#)

Just How Effective Are Fentanyl Test Strips?

Some states have shifted from banning Fentanyl test strips to colleges requiring them on campus. But like chocolate chips in a batch of chocolate chip cookies, **Fentanyl is not evenly spread throughout pills**. Parts of the pill that are tested cannot be used, but a part of the pill that has not been tested could be lethal.

[A CBS News Sacramento investigation breaks it down for you.](#)

How Iceland Gave Teens Something Better Than Drugs—and Transformed a Generation

In the late 1990s, Iceland had one of the worst teenage substance abuse rates in Europe. Nearly half of all 16-year-olds had been drunk in the past month. Education campaigns weren't working. Warnings weren't working. So, they tried something completely different.

Research suggested **teenagers weren't addicted to substances. They were addicted to what substances did to their brain chemistry**. The fix wasn't punishment or education. It was a replacement.

Iceland's response was to subsidize sport, music, art, dance and social activities on a massive scale. They encouraged parent-child time. They gave teenagers somewhere to be.

The Algorithm Lights Up: YouTube Recommendations and Tobacco Content

What starts as an innocent search can quickly spiral into something more concerning. New research from Truth Initiative suggests that YouTube's recommendation engine may be quietly steering viewers—especially young people—toward pro-tobacco content, normalizing and even glamorizing nicotine use along the way. At a time when nearly 90% of teens use the platform and tobacco imagery is already widespread across media, the findings raise urgent questions about how algorithms shape behavior—and who is most at risk. [READ MORE.](#)

The Marijuana Breathalyzer May Be Here And It's 3D-Printed and Cheap

As marijuana legalization expands across the country, law enforcement has struggled to find a fast, reliable way to test for recent use behind the wheel. Now, a team of researchers says they may be closer than ever, thanks to a cheap, 3D-printed device that can detect THC on a person's breath in just minutes. Small, portable and far less expensive than traditional testing methods, this technology could mark a major shift in roadside testing—bringing a long-discussed idea closer to reality. [READ MORE.](#)

Nuts About Nicotine: The Hidden Risk Vapes Pose to Animals

Squirrels and other animals aren't actually "vaping," but they are being put at risk by discarded e-cigarettes. The fruity smells can attract wildlife, causing them to chew on or ingest the devices. This exposes them to toxic nicotine, harmful microplastics and batteries, all of which can cause serious illness or death. Cases have already been reported involving squirrels, birds and pets. The situation highlights a growing danger: **improperly discarded vape products are becoming a real threat to animal health and wildlife safety.** [READ MORE.](#)

How the Internet Became the "Cookbook" for the Drug Trade

It's not just the drugs that have changed—it's how people learn to make them. What used to require access to labs or insider knowledge can now be pieced together online, where forums, encrypted chats and even legitimate research papers act like a step-by-step guide for creating powerful synthetic opioids like nitazenes. That easy access to information is lowering the barrier to entry, meaning **more people can experiment, produce and distribute these substances**—often faster than authorities can track. The result is a drug landscape that's not only more dangerous, but constantly evolving, driven as much by what's shared on the internet as what's happening on the street. [READ MORE.](#)

Flushed Away: Students' Vapes Clog Pipes & Budgets

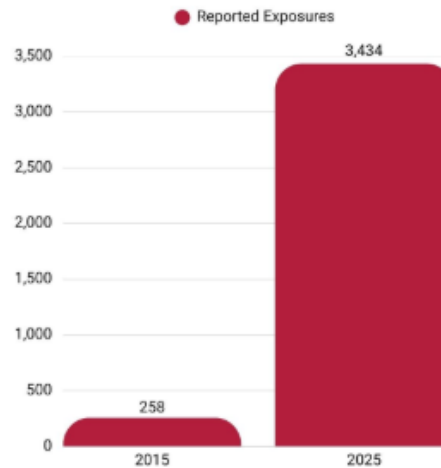
A growing problem in schools is taking an unexpected and costly turn, as students caught vaping are increasingly flushing their devices down toilets to avoid getting in trouble. What might seem

like a quick way to hide evidence is leading to serious consequences—**clogged pipes, broken plumbing systems and thousands of dollars in repairs for schools**. In some cases, entire bathrooms have been shut down due to repeated damage. Beyond the financial impact, experts warn that these plastic-and-metal devices don't break down easily, raising concerns about long-term environmental harm and contamination of water systems. [READ MORE.](#)

Sharp Rise in Kratom-Related Poison Calls Raises Alarms Nationwide

The CDC's March 2026 report shows a dramatic increase in Kratom-related calls to poison centers over the past decade, rising from just 258 cases in 2015 to a record 3,434 in 2025—about **a 1,200% jump**. This steady climb suggests that Kratom use, or at least harmful exposures, has been growing significantly in the U.S., highlighting a clear upward trend that public health officials are paying close attention to. [READ MORE.](#)

Between 2015 and 2025, U.S. Poison Center data show kratom-related exposures increasing
1,231%



Towers ER, Thomas VT, Havelka CP, Finkel H. Increase in Kratom-Related Reports to Poison Centers — National Poison Data System, United States, 2015–2025. *MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2025; 174(12):219–245.

SAM

Is THC Addictive?

Anything that makes you high can be addictive and THC fits the bill. But don't take our word for it—the medical and psychiatric consensus is that THC is quite addictive, as recognized in the DSM-5, which classifies **cannabis use disorder (CUD)** as a substance use disorder. Today's cannabis products, especially high-potency concentrates like wax and shatter, contain far higher levels of THC than in the past, increasing the risk of dependency. Research suggests **about 30% of users develop some form of CUD**, with a smaller portion experiencing full addiction that interferes with daily life, particularly among those who start young. Overall, rising THC potency has intensified concerns about its addictive potential and its impact on physical, mental and social well-being. [READ MORE.](#)



Relaunches with New Design & Expanded Tools to Support Montana Families

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)



“ACME” in the cartoons always felt like it had to be a real place somewhere and since my dad was the store manager at ACME Markets, I was pretty convinced that’s where Wile E. Coyote did his shopping. Seeing it on a real storefront just confirmed the whole thing in my mind. And honestly, the fact that I never saw any TNT or rocket skates on the shelves probably just meant they were in the back...clearly reserved for coyotes with questionable decision-making skills.

Looking back, it’s kind of funny—but also a reminder of how easily we believe something just because it seems real or familiar. As a kid, I didn’t question it. I just accepted it.

That same idea shows up in real life too, especially when it comes to substance use. Sometimes things are presented in a way that makes them seem normal, harmless or even appealing—kind of like those ACME products that always promised a quick fix for Wile E. Coyote. But just like in the cartoons, those “solutions” usually come with consequences that aren’t obvious at first.

What I’ve come to realize is how important it is to look a little closer, ask questions and not just accept something at face value. Because whether it’s a cartoon product or a real-life choice, what seems convincing in the moment isn’t always what’s actually safe or good for you. -B

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