

This issue of *What's Trending* takes a wide-angle look at emerging substance use, youth safety and public health concerns, from Montana lawmakers weighing Kratom regulation ahead of the 2027 session to the growing dangers of America's nicotine boom. It explores whether so-called legal drugs are truly safer than illegal ones, breaks down what counts as a standard drink and explains why women face greater risks from alcohol-related harms. The issue also examines Big Tobacco's evolving playbook, helps readers recognize familial human trafficking and tackles tough parenting questions like whether children should be on Snapchat, all with a focus on prevention, awareness and informed decision-making. We hope you find this issue meaningful.

# what's trending?

ALCOHOL & DRUGS IN GREAT FALLS & CASCADE COUNTY

March 2026, Issue 3

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## Alcohol Checks Show 82% Passed

The Great Falls Police Department checked 58 alcohol-selling businesses on January 29, 2026. 82% passed, the same as last year. Volunteers under 21 tried to buy alcohol, showing ID when asked, to make sure stores are following the rules. GFPD praised the businesses that passed and cited employees at the eight locations that sold to underage buyers. [READ MORE.](#)

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## A Kratom Verdict in Search of Evidence

Leaked emails tell a very different story than the one the Kratom industry has been telling in public. What looks like a sudden safety crackdown on the compound 7-OH appears, behind the scenes, to be a calculated response to market pressure as newer products started eating into the profits of legacy Kratom sellers. Instead of competing, industry insiders turned their attention to regulators, arranging meetings, shaping enforcement narratives and leaning on a small circle of academic voices to give their concerns scientific weight. As alarmist headlines multiplied and regulators moved closer to scheduling 7-OH, the records suggest the process wasn't driven by new data or an unfolding health crisis but by a fight for control of the market. The deeper you look, the clearer it becomes that this wasn't just about safety. It was about who gets to survive. [READ MORE.](#)

## Montana lawmakers look to regulate Kratom ahead of 2027 session

Lawmakers in Montana are starting early conversations about how Kratom should be handled before the 2027 legislative session, driven by concerns about rising use, especially highly potent synthetic products, and the fact that there are currently no statewide rules around age limits or

sales. A proposal last session that would have capped potency and restricted sales to adults didn't move forward, leaving regulation to a patchwork of local actions, including bans passed by Yellowstone County and the Blackfeet Nation. With worries about youth access and public health growing, legislators plan to keep studying how other states are responding and are expected to revisit the issue in committee meetings later this year. [READ MORE.](#)

## Did You Know?



Use the “Talk. They Hear You.” campaign’s **Five Conversation Goals** to help reinforce a strong, open relationship with children.

1. Show you **CARE** about their health, wellness and well-being.
2. Emphasize your **POSITION** on underage drinking and other substance use.
3. Be a good source of **INFORMATION** about alcohol and other drugs.
4. Pay attention and **ENCOURAGE** healthy decisions.
5. Help build **SKILLS** and strategies for avoiding drinking and other drug use.

Setting clear and consistent rules about alcohol use and enforcing them when needed are important to help teens avoid drinking ([NIAAA](#)). Check out the [Parent and Caregiver Resources](#) page on the “Talk. They Hear You.” website for more tools you can share or use to support conversations about alcohol and substance use with youth.

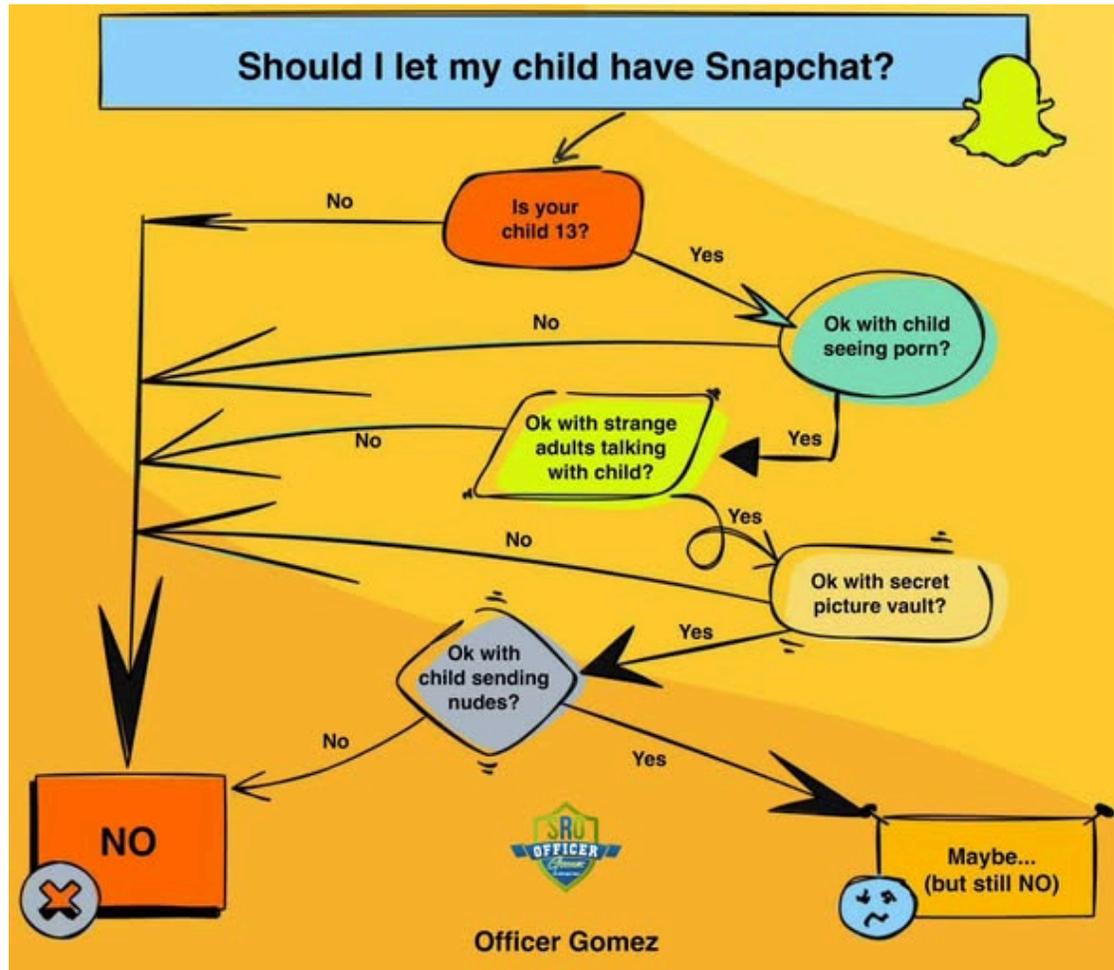
## The Dangers of America's Nicotine Boom

Imagine a world where a once-dreaded drug sheds its grim image and sneaks into boardrooms, gyms and TikTok culture under the guise of focus, performance and hustle — only to reveal a paradox that could be reshaping bodies and brains in ways we’re only beginning to grasp. In *The Dangers of America's Nicotine Boom* you'll meet wellness-obsessed entrepreneurs chasing razor-sharp attention with discreet pouches, scientists sounding alarms about addiction and cardiovascular strain, and regulators tangled in a storm of hype and half-answers. It's a riveting deep dive into how nicotine's makeover might just be the next public-health puzzle you didn't see coming. [READ MORE.](#)

## Are “Legal Drugs” Safer Than Illegal Drugs?

This is a question parents, educators and law enforcement professionals hear often and one many people answer subconsciously without realizing it. There is a widespread belief that if a substance is legal, it must be safe. The word “legal” creates a false sense of security, especially when it comes to substances that are easily accessible, openly marketed and not hidden in the shadows.

The truth is simple and important: “Legal does not mean safe.” In fact, there are many legal substances that can be just as dangerous, and in some cases more dangerous, than illegal drugs. That same misconception applies to products labeled as “herbal” or “natural.” These terms are often mistaken for harmless, when in reality they can carry serious risks. [READ MORE from The Tall Cop.](#)



## Big Tobacco's Script for 2026

In a nutshell...

- In 2026, the tobacco industry will use **misleading claims** to promote its products to hook new users, while hiding the fact that it mainly sells cigarettes.
- The industry will claim that products like heated tobacco and nicotine pouches are helping people quit smoking, despite the **lack of independent evidence**. Some evidence even suggests these products perpetuate smoking.
- It will also continue insisting that its newer products are only intended for adults, while **aggressively marketing them to young people**.

[READ MORE.](#)

## Recognizing Familial Human Trafficking

Familial trafficking is especially hard to detect because it hides in plain sight. Victims often feel deep loyalty to abusive family members, making outside help difficult. Traffickers exploit trust within the family to manipulate and control, while isolation and the normalization of abuse make the exploitation harder to recognize. This helps explain why studies show how common it is. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime found that about **30% of identified trafficking victims were trafficked by a family member** and the International Labour Organization **estimates the number could be as high as 50% worldwide**. Fear of consequences and limited awareness keep many victims from reporting, allowing this form of trafficking to remain largely hidden.

Here are **8 questions to consider** when identifying familial trafficking in youth and young adults.

1. **Family Dynamics:** Are the individual's family members overly controlling or protective of one another?
2. **Communication Restrictions:** Is the individual reluctant to talk freely or seem to be under constant surveillance?
3. **Isolation:** Is the individual isolated from friends, neighbors or community activities? Are they discouraged from making outside connections?
4. **Behavioral Indicators:** Does the individual show signs of fear, anxiety, depression or submissiveness when family members are around?
5. **Awareness of Exploitation:** Does the individual seem unaware that their situation may be exploitative or abusive?
6. **Health and Wellbeing:** Are there signs of physical abuse, malnutrition or lack of medical care?
7. **School and Work Attendance:** Does the individual have unexplained absences from school or work, or lack access to education or employment opportunities?
8. **Dependence on Family:** Does the individual rely heavily on family members to the point where they seem unable to make decisions independently?

[Need more information? Visit Youth Collaboratory.](#)

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## Shrooms, Science & Serious Risks

Magic mushrooms, or psilocybin, are popping up increasingly in local conversations—not just in research journals but in hospital ERs and poison control calls—yet the risks are often misunderstood. While clinical studies show promise for psilocybin under strict professional supervision, recreational use among adolescents and young adults is rising sharply and is linked to serious harms like acute panic, psychotic-like symptoms, long-term cognitive effects and even higher rates of schizophrenia diagnoses compared to other substances. Decriminalization in some cities has led many to mistakenly assume shrooms are “safe,” but experts warn that unregulated use, especially during ongoing brain development, can lead to accidents, self-harm and lasting mental health challenges. [Click through to read the full article](#) for detailed evidence and expert insights on why this trend matters for families, courts and communities.

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## What is a Standard Drink?

You can make more informed choices when you know how much alcohol you are consuming. This video walks you through measuring a standard drink!



## Why do women face higher risks for alcohol-related consequences?

A growing body of evidence indicates that women who drink are at increased susceptibility to short- and long-term alcohol-related consequences, including liver disease, cardiovascular disease, neurotoxicity, and alcohol-related memory blackouts, compared to men. One reason for this is that alcohol resides predominantly in body water, and pound for pound, women have less water in their bodies than men. This means that after a woman and a man of the same weight drink the same amount of alcohol, the woman's BAC will tend to be higher, putting her at greater risk for harm.

Other biological differences may contribute as well. While alcohol misuse by anyone presents a serious public health concern, women face alcohol-related problems sooner and at lower drinking levels than men. Women who drink are also at greater risk for developing breast cancer than women who do not consume alcohol.

Rethinking Drinking, NIAAA

## 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)



Addiction is a river.  
Downstream are the sirens, ambulances, court dates and consequences.  
Upstream is where the work actually matters.

I work upstream.  
Before the first drink becomes a habit.  
Before curiosity turns into coping.  
Before drugs or alcohol are asked to solve problems they only deepen.

Prevention is not about rescuing people from the water.  
It's about changing the current, strengthening the banks  
and teaching people how to swim long before the river gets rough.

Stop the flow before it floods lives.  
That's prevention.

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