



Kratom Widely Available in U.S. Tobacco Shops Despite Federal Warnings

The addictive substance has been linked to liver toxicity, acute liver failure and overdose deaths.

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Almost 75% of U.S. tobacco and vape shops sell kratom, an addictive substance that has effects similar to opioids and has been linked to [liver](#) toxicity, according to a new study [published in the American Journal of Public Health](#).

Kratom is a tree native to Southeast Asia that has been used as a stimulant and for pain management for centuries. The substance has become increasingly popular in the United States. In fact, more than [two million people in the country use kratom annually](#).

Despite its growing popularity, the [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\) warns consumers not to use kratom](#) because of its potential for serious adverse health events including liver toxicity, seizures and substance use disorder. Kratom use has also [been linked to acute liver injury](#) and, in a rare case, acute [liver failure](#) resulting in the need for a liver transplant.

“This product, it’s being marketed as being a mood stabilizer and painkiller, but then we also have several warnings from federal agencies and people who have died from overdoses,” study author and assistant professor of public health at the University of Mississippi (UM) Andrew Yockey, [said in a news release](#).

In 2016, the Drug Enforcement Administration briefly classified kratom as a Schedule I drug but withdrew the classification after public backlash. What’s more, several states have tried to restrict the product, and some have banned it, including Alabama, Arkansas, Vermont, Rhode Island, Indiana and Wisconsin.

For the study, researchers spoke with employees at more than 500 [tobacco](#) and [vape](#) stores

across the country. More than 80% of vape and tobacco stores located in states where kratom is legal reported selling it. In states where kratom is illegal, most establishments adhered to laws, but some did not. For example, about 40% of the surveyed stores in Rhode Island reported selling it.

“There are people who think this is a fantastic product, but it’s also linked to these poisonings and hospitalizations,” Yockey said. “So why are people using it? Because it’s so widely available. Ease of access is one of the biggest risk factors for substance use besides peer pressure.”

From 2016 to 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documented more than 90 deaths attributable to the supplement. In 2018, the FDA issued recalls for products that included kratom as a result of contamination with salmonella. The agency also warned vendors selling the supplement not to make unproven health claims about the product, such as that it could help treat withdrawal from opioids.

“One of the biggest health things that we’re seeing is that these products are hitting the market without supervision,” Yockey said. “And if there’s no supervision, do you really know what you’re putting in your system?”

To read more, click [#Liver Health](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Millions in U.S. Take Supplements That May Harm the Liver](#),” “[Dietary Supplements Linked to More Cases of Severe Liver Damage](#)” and “[Excessive Diet Soda Consumption Linked to Liver Disease](#).”