Kratom and 7-OH: What's on the Shelf and What's at Stake

What kratom-derived products reveal about risk in a fast-changing drug landscape

Illustrative composite showing examples of kratom and 7-OH product packaging.

Kratom and 7-OH are increasingly making national headlines as public health officials, researchers and families raise concerns about products sold online and in smoke shops, gas stations and convenience stores.

In August 2026, *The Wall Street Journal* examined addiction and deaths associated with kratom products and the growing debate over how they should be regulated. The coverage came amid increasing federal scrutiny of concentrated 7-OH products and new efforts to restrict some of the most potent formulations. [1]

At first glance, it can sound like a story about one substance.

It isn't.

One of the challenges in understanding the issue is that the word *kratom* is being used to describe products that can be very different from one another.

What changed is not simply the substance. It is the product.

Kratom comes from the leaves of *Mitragyna speciosa*, a tree native to Southeast Asia. Its main active compound is mitragynine. The plant also naturally contains 7-hydroxymitragynine, or 7-OH, but in relatively small amounts.

The U.S. marketplace has evolved far beyond traditional kratom leaf. Products now include powders, capsules and extracts, as well as tablets, gummies, drink mixes and shots containing concentrated or enhanced levels of 7-OH. The FDA describes these concentrated 7-OH products as potent opioid products and has warned consumers to avoid them. [2]

A product derived from kratom is not necessarily comparable to the leaf from which it originated.

And the products do not necessarily look like what many people would think of as a drug. They can come in brightly colored packages and familiar forms such as gummies or small drink shots. Some are labeled with terms such as “plant alkaloids” or marketed as dietary supplements or wellness products for pain, anxiety, depression, energy or opioid withdrawal.

California health officials have warned that products containing kratom or 7-OH may not have been tested for safety, consistency or accurate labeling. [3]

A professionally packaged product can look familiar, regulated and carefully vetted. A stated serving size on the label can look reassuring. So can words such as *natural*, *herbal* or *plant-based*.

But none of those cues necessarily tells a consumer how potent a product is, what it actually contains or whether it has been tested for safety, consistency or effectiveness.

Why 7-OH has changed the conversation

Public health concern has increasingly focused on concentrated 7-OH because of the way it acts on opioid receptors and its potential for dependence, withdrawal and overdose.

At the same time, the broader science around kratom is more complex than a simple dangerous-or-safe equation. Traditional kratom leaf, its main active compound mitragynine and concentrated 7-OH are often referenced using the same broad *kratom* label, even though they are not interchangeable.

The FDA continues to warn against using kratom to treat medical conditions and says it cannot lawfully be marketed as a dietary supplement or added to conventional foods. At the same time, researchers at the National Institutes of Health and the University of Florida are preparing to study purified mitragynine, the main active compound in kratom, as a potential treatment for opioid use disorder. In June 2026, the FDA allowed an NIH investigational new drug application to take effect, clearing the way for an initial human safety trial. [4]

Illustrative image of laboratory research.

Those two facts are not necessarily contradictory. Studying a purified compound under controlled clinical conditions is very different from commercially manufactured products containing concentrated 7-OH.

The FDA has received reports of addiction, seizures, gastrointestinal problems, insomnia and withdrawal associated with 7-OH products. In Los Angeles County, public health officials had identified six fatal overdoses associated with 7-OH ingestion by October 2025. [5]

Addiction specialists interviewed by California media have also described patients who began using 7-OH for reasons such as chronic pain rather than recreational drug use, only to develop dependence or opioid use disorder. Others have described difficult withdrawal and the challenges of treating people who may not initially recognize these products as opioid-like substances.

The concern is also showing up in treatment settings. In San Luis Obispo County, drug treatment centers have reported 40% more intakes involving kratom and 7-OH withdrawal, according to county public health officials. Nationally, addiction treatment providers are also reporting sharp increases in patients seeking help for dependence on kratom and concentrated 7-OH products. [6]

Mixing substances adds another layer of risk. In Los Angeles County, alcohol was present in many of the six fatal overdose cases associated with 7-OH, along with medications and, at times, illicit drugs. In San Diego County, the medical director of the California Poison Control System has said some of the most concerning cases involve kratom products combined with alcohol or opioids such as fentanyl. More recently, the Nashville medical examiner found that 29-year-old music producer Tay Keith died from the combined toxicity of kratom compounds and ketamine. [7]

Mixing 7-OH with alcohol or other substances can increase the risk of overdose.

Dr. Gary Tsai, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's Substance Abuse Prevention and Control Bureau, has emphasized both the danger and the need for practical harm reduction. "The safest thing to do is avoid using 7-OH and kratom-related products altogether," he said, while also urging people who do use them not to mix substances and to keep naloxone available. [8]

When illegal doesn't mean unavailable

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the Governor's Office have made clear that products containing kratom or 7-OH are illegal to manufacture or sell for consumption in California. State agencies have also stepped up education, inspections and enforcement. In September 2026, the Newsom administration reported that 7,888 prohibited kratom and 7-OH products had been removed from store shelves following 8,038 site visits, with 97.75% compliance among businesses licensed by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. [9]

Yet availability has persisted.

In 2026, *Orange County Register* journalists went into vape shops across Orange County and were able to purchase multiple kratom and 7-OH products despite state and local restrictions. At one shop, a clerk warned them about the dangers of the products even as kratom and 7-OH were displayed behind him; the reporters walked out with a box of 7-OH tablets.

Their reporting also exposed a complicated enforcement system. For example, the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control could act at businesses it licenses, while many vape and tobacco shops are licensed by the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration, which said it did not have authority to enforce the public-health prohibition. The California Department of Public Health ultimately said enforcement was its responsibility. [10]

Consumers may reasonably assume that if a product has been prohibited from sale, it will no longer be readily available in stores. And if a product can still be purchased openly at a neighborhood store or ordered online, it is easy to assume it must be legal or relatively safe.

California is part of a broader national response, with states taking different approaches ranging from restrictions on the sale of kratom products to controlled-substance scheduling and separate regulation of natural kratom and concentrated or synthetic derivatives. [11]

"Kratom and 7-OH illustrate a larger public health challenge: the marketplace can change faster than awareness and regulation can keep up. The response cannot stop at removing products from shelves. It also has to help people understand the risks, prevent harm and make sure treatment is available when people need it," says Edgar Carapetian, Interim President and Chief Executive Officer of Phoenix Houses of California.

Prevention is adapting, too

Public health agencies are already responding to the changing marketplace with educational materials on kratom and 7-OH, guidance for health care providers, retailer outreach and information about overdose risk and harm reduction. [12]

Community prevention programs are encountering the issue closer to where young people live and go to school.

As part of Phoenix Houses of California's prevention work in the San Fernando and Santa Clarita valleys, prevention staff conduct environmental scans in communities around schools. That includes visiting nearby smoke shops and other retailers to understand what products are being sold and sharing what they learn with schools and community partners. Kratom and 7-OH have become part of that emerging-substance education and outreach.

"Products and packaging will keep changing," says Sarah Redfield, prevention manager for Phoenix Houses of California. "Parents don't need to become experts on every substance. What they can do is help young people look beyond how a product is marketed and not assume that it is safe simply because it is being sold openly on the shelves of local retail stores."

That means teaching young people to look past the package and ask some basic questions:

- What is actually in this product?
- What claims are being made about it?
- Has it been tested?
- Is it approved for the purpose being advertised?
- Could it interact with alcohol, medication or another substance?

It also means talking about why someone might be interested in the product in the first place.

A young person looking for energy, relief from anxiety, better sleep or a way to cope with pain may not think of themselves as seeking out a dangerous substance. A product presented as a supplement or natural remedy may seem very different from the drugs they have been warned about.

That makes the conversation about more than a label.

What kratom tells us about risk

Kratom and 7-OH offer a broader lesson about risk in a fast-changing drug marketplace. The pace of change can outstrip public awareness and regulatory response. New products appear. Ingredients are concentrated or reformulated. Packaging changes. Marketing finds new language.

Trying to keep track of every new substance and product is not a realistic way to stay safe.

Accurate information about specific substances still matters. So does knowing what to look for when encountering an unfamiliar product: questioning marketing claims, recognizing that availability does not equal safety, understanding what a product contains and considering how it could interact with alcohol, medications or other substances.

For anyone already using 7-OH, the conversation also becomes one of safety and access to help. California and Los Angeles County health officials advise against combining 7-OH with alcohol or other drugs and recommend having naloxone available because it can reverse opioid-related respiratory depression. Someone who becomes unresponsive should receive emergency medical attention immediately. [13]

As the debate continues to evolve over how kratom and 7-OH products should be regulated, substance use disorder treatment providers are already seeing the real-world consequences. Staying current with emerging formulations and patterns of use helps treatment providers recognize dependence and withdrawal, ask informed questions and adapt care as evidence develops. For some people, the effects of a product can last well beyond its time on a store shelf.

SOURCES

[1] Sumathi Reddy, ***A Herbal Product Sold at Gas Stations Is Being Blamed for an Addiction Crisis***, The Wall Street Journal, Aug. 11, 2026; U.S. Food and Drug Administration, ***Hiding in Plain Sight: 7-OH Products***, updated July 13, 2026.

[2] U.S. Food and Drug Administration, ***Products Containing 7-OH Can Cause Serious Harm***; U.S. Food and Drug Administration, ***FDA and Kratom***.

[3] California Department of Public Health, ***CDPH Warns Retailers and Public About the Dangers of Kratom-derived Products and 7-OH***, Jan. 16, 2026.

[4] National Institutes of Health, ***NIH Research Clears Way for Study of Experimental Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder***, June 1, 2026; U.S. Food and Drug Administration, ***FDA and Kratom***.

[5] U.S. Food and Drug Administration, ***Products Containing 7-OH Can Cause Serious Harm***; Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, ***Additional Fatal Overdoses Tied to Synthetic Kratom in Los Angeles County***, Oct. 10, 2025.

[6] Seth Pintar, ***San Luis Obispo County approved $167,000 of opioid settlement money to address kratom addiction. Here's why***, Mustang News, Sept. 18, 2026; Theresa Gaffney, ***Addiction clinics see rising cases of kratom and 7-OH withdrawal***, STAT, Sept. 21, 2026.

[7] Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, ***Additional Fatal Overdoses Tied to Synthetic Kratom in Los Angeles County***, Oct. 10, 2025; Austin Grabish, ***31 deaths linked to kratom in San Diego County since 2023***, ABC 10News San Diego, Aug. 14, 2026; Rachel DeSantis, ***Tay Keith Cause of Death Revealed as Accidental Kratom, Ketamine Overdose***, People. Sept. 18, 2026.

[8] Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, ***Additional Fatal Overdoses Tied to Synthetic Kratom in Los Angeles County***, Oct. 10, 2025.

[9] California Department of Public Health, ***Prohibition on the Sale of Kratom and 7-OH Products***, Jan. 9, 2026; Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, ***Governor Newsom announces nearly 15,300 illegal hemp, kratom and 7-OH products removed from California store shelves***, Sept. 2, 2026.

[10] Teri Sforza, ***'Gas station heroin' still widely available at vape shops, despite bans***, Orange County Register, May 8, 2026; California Department of Public Health, ***Prohibition on the Sale and Marketing of Kratom and 7-OH Products***, Jan. 9, 2026.

[11] Alison Kuznitz, ***Kratom ban meets quiet compliance as retailers clear shelves***, State House News Service/WBUR, Sept. 10, 2026; Office of North Dakota Governor Kelly Armstrong, ***Armstrong signs bill banning synthetic kratom, restricting natural kratom to 21 and older***, Sept. 4, 2026.

[12] California Department of Public Health, ***CDPH Warns Retailers and Public About the Dangers of Kratom-derived Products and 7-OH***, Jan. 16, 2026; Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Substance Abuse Prevention and Control, ***Kratom/7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH)***.

[13] Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, ***Additional Fatal Overdoses Tied to Synthetic Kratom in Los Angeles County***, Oct. 10, 2025; California Department of Public Health, ***CDPH Warns Retailers and Public About the Dangers of Kratom-derived Products and 7-OH***, Jan. 16, 2026.