AMERICAN KRATOM ASSOCIATION
Protecting Consumer Access to Safe, Natural Kratom
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American Kratom Association Expresses Condolences Following Tragic Deaths of University of Mississippi Students

AKA urges media, policymakers, and public officials to await toxicology results and distinguish natural kratom leaf from chemically manipulated and synthetic opioids

WASHINGTON, D.C. — September 23, 2026 — The American Kratom Association extends its deepest condolences to the families, friends, classmates, and the entire University of Mississippi community following the tragic deaths of two Ole Miss students.

The loss of young lives is devastating, and the AKA joins the university community in mourning these students and supporting their families and loved ones during this extraordinarily difficult time.

The AKA also strongly supports the request by university and local law enforcement officials that the public avoid speculation about the causes of these deaths while the investigations, autopsies, and toxicological analyses are underway.

According to statements from Lafayette County Metro Narcotics, packaged products identified as kratom were found during both investigations. However, authorities have explicitly stated that they **"do not have confirmed information indicating that kratom or any other substance was a contributing factor in either death."** Authorities have also said there is currently no confirmed evidence establishing that the two deaths are connected, and the cases are being investigated separately.

"First and foremost, these are two tragic losses of young lives, and our thoughts and prayers are with their families and the entire Ole Miss community," said Mac Haddow, Senior Fellow on Public Policy for the American Kratom Association. "The responsible course at this point is precisely what law enforcement and the university have requested: allow the investigations and toxicology testing to determine the facts before conclusions are drawn about what substances, if any, contributed to these deaths."

The AKA cautions media organizations and policymakers against assuming that the presence of a package labeled or described as "kratom" establishes either ingestion or causation — or establishes what chemical constituents were actually contained in the product.

NMS Labs, the leading forensic toxicology laboratory in America, has similarly advised law enforcement agencies and medical examiners not to leap to the conclusion that natural kratom leaf contributed to or caused a death merely because kratom is identified at a scene or detected during an initial investigation. As NMS Labs has explained, the pharmacology and rapidly changing illicit-drug supply require testing beyond routine toxicology panels, which may not detect many illicit, novel, synthetic, or chemically

modified substances. Accordingly, investigators should identify the specific compounds present and interpret those findings in the context of the complete autopsy and toxicology evidence before attributing causation to natural kratom leaf.

That distinction has become increasingly important because products containing concentrated or chemically manipulated 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) and other novel substances have been marketed in ways that can cause them to be confused with traditional botanical kratom products.

Federal health and law enforcement agencies have expressly recognized these distinctions. On July 1, the Drug Enforcement Administration announced temporary Schedule I action targeting concentrated and synthetic 7-OH products, describing them as an imminent threat to public safety, and separately moved to schedule three related synthetic compounds: mitragynine pseudoindoxyl, MGM-15, and MGM-16. DEA specifically stated that its 7-OH action was not intended to apply to botanical kratom products containing naturally occurring 7-OH below the specified threshold. FDA has likewise characterized concentrated 7-OH products as novel, potent opioid products while explaining that 7-OH occurs naturally only in trace amounts in kratom leaf.

"These federal actions make it more important than ever that investigators identify exactly what substances were present rather than simply applying the generic term 'kratom,'" Haddow said. "A package carrying that word does not tell investigators whether the product was traditional natural kratom leaf, a concentrated or chemically manipulated 7-OH product, a product containing pseudoindoxyl or another synthetic compound, or whether some entirely different substance was involved."

There are already unconfirmed reports circulating within the university community concerning a different synthetic opioid called cyclorphine. Those reports have not been verified by law enforcement and should not be treated as established fact. They do, however, underscore why speculation about causation is premature until comprehensive toxicological testing is completed.

The AKA urges investigators to conduct comprehensive quantitative toxicology capable of distinguishing mitragynine, 7-OH, mitragynine pseudoindoxyl, MGM-15, MGM-16, and other novel synthetic opioids or illicit substances that may be relevant to these cases.

"The public deserves to know what actually happened," Haddow said. "If a dangerous substance contributed to these deaths, it is critically important that it be accurately identified so students, parents, public health officials, law enforcement, and policymakers receive the correct warning. Misidentifying a substance does nothing to protect the public and could divert attention from the actual threat."

The AKA will cooperate fully with Mississippi officials and will make available scientific and technical expertise regarding the analytical testing necessary to distinguish natural kratom leaf constituents from chemically manipulated 7-OH and other emerging synthetic substances.

Until those investigations and toxicology results are complete, the AKA urges the media, policymakers, and the public to respect the families involved, follow the guidance of law enforcement, and avoid assigning a cause to these tragic deaths that has not been established by scientific evidence.

About the American Kratom Association

The American Kratom Association is a consumer advocacy organization committed to protecting access to safe, natural kratom leaf products and advancing science-based consumer protection standards. AKA supports age restrictions, accurate labeling, contaminant testing, good manufacturing practices, and strong enforcement against adulterated, mislabeled, synthetic, semi-synthetic, concentrated, fortified, or chemically manipulated products falsely marketed as kratom.

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