



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sensationalized Headlines Misrepresent CDC Kratom Report, Risk Driving Bad Public Policy

Washington, D.C. — April 1, 2026 — Mac Haddow, Senior Fellow on Public Policy for the American Kratom Association (AKA), today issued a strong warning to policymakers and the media following the release of a new report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, cautioning that misleading headlines are distorting the underlying data and threatening to drive harmful policy decisions.

“The CDC report is being widely mischaracterized in sensational headlines that suggest a growing danger from kratom,” Haddow said. “But a careful reading of the actual data shows something very different: an increase in reports that closely tracks the growing number of kratom consumers in the United States—not a new safety signal tied to natural kratom leaf products.”

The CDC analysis relies on data from the National Poison Data System, a voluntary reporting system that captures calls to poison control centers involving actual or suspected exposure to substances. However, NPDS data is not designed to establish causation and includes cases where kratom is merely mentioned—not confirmed as the cause of any adverse outcome.

“Headlines are ignoring the most critical limitation of this report,” Haddow continued. “The CDC explicitly acknowledges that these data cannot determine whether kratom actually caused the reported outcomes. Yet that hasn’t stopped some from portraying this as evidence of a kratom safety crisis.”

Haddow emphasized that the most serious outcomes identified in the report overwhelmingly involve multiple substances—not kratom alone. According to the CDC, the majority of reported deaths involved polydrug exposure, with opioids, benzodiazepines, alcohol, and stimulants frequently present.

“That is not a kratom story—that is a polydrug use story,” Haddow said. “Conflating the two is not just inaccurate—it is dangerous.”

The report also fails to distinguish between traditional, natural kratom leaf products and increasingly prevalent high-potency, chemically manipulated compounds such as 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), which are often marketed as “kratom” despite having fundamentally different pharmacological profiles.

“By lumping together natural kratom leaf with synthetic or highly concentrated compounds, the CDC data creates a misleading picture of risk,” Haddow added. “Federal health authorities have already made clear that their concern is with these chemically manipulated products—not natural kratom.”

Haddow noted that the increase in poison center calls is consistent with broader trends cited in the report, including rising kratom use, increased product availability, and expanded import volumes.

“When millions more Americans begin using a product, it is entirely predictable that reports and inquiries will increase,” Haddow said. “That is basic exposure math—not evidence that the product itself has become more dangerous.”

Haddow warned that policymakers must look beyond headlines and carefully examine the underlying data before taking action.

“We have seen this before—flawed interpretations of incomplete data leading to misguided bans that ultimately harm consumers,” Haddow said. “Sensationalized reporting on this CDC study risks repeating those mistakes.”

The American Kratom Association is urging regulators and lawmakers to focus on science-based policies that distinguish between natural kratom products and dangerous adulterated or synthetic compounds, including 7-OH products that are currently being reviewed for federal scheduling.

“The real public health threat is not natural kratom,” Haddow concluded. “It is the failure to accurately interpret data and the rush to regulate based on headlines rather than facts.”

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