



Public Health
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Dubuque County
Public Health Department



UnityPoint Health
Visiting Nurse Association

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PRESS RELEASE

Dubuque County Public Health Officials Warn of Serious Health Risks Associated with Kratom and Concentrated 7-OH Products

Iowa reports 45 kratom-associated deaths since 2024 as poison control calls rise

DUBUQUE COUNTY, Iowa – October 13, 2026

Dubuque County Public Health officials are urging residents to understand the potentially serious health risks associated with kratom, particularly concentrated products containing 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), amid an increase in kratom-associated deaths and poison control calls reported by Iowa officials.

Kratom is commonly sold as a powder, capsule, gummy, tablet, beverage, or energy shot. Marketed for purposes such as pain relief, energy, anxiety, and opioid withdrawal, kratom is often promoted as a natural or herbal product. However, **natural does not mean safe**. Kratom contains psychoactive compounds that can affect the brain and body, including compounds with stimulant-like and opioid-like effects. Concentrated 7-OH products raise additional concerns because they may contain substantially higher concentrations of this opioid-active compound than are naturally present in kratom leaf.

“The newer, concentrated and synthetic forms of kratom are similar in effect to very high-potency opioids. This includes increasing the risk of death by reducing breathing and heart rate. This substance is also addictive, and the body becomes dependent on it. Additionally, there is little oversight or regulation of kratom currently, as it is marketed as a natural substance,” said Dr. Preeti Joseph, MD, and a member of the Dubuque County Board of Health.

Iowa reports kratom-associated deaths and rising poison control calls

According to Iowa Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS), 45 kratom-associated deaths have been confirmed in Iowa since 2024 across 23 counties, including 16 deaths during the first seven months of 2026. Iowa Poison Control also received 68 kratom exposure calls during the first part of 2026, a reported 467% increase over two years.

These figures underscore the need for greater public awareness of kratom-related risks, including the dangers associated with concentrated products, regular use, and potential impairment.



Kratom use can lead to physical dependence, and stopping after regular use may cause withdrawal symptoms. Potential adverse effects can include seizures and liver injury. The risks may be greater when kratom or 7-OH products are combined with other substances.

Kratom can also put people at risk behind the wheel

Local law enforcement reports that kratom can cause impairment and intoxication. Although kratom is not currently a scheduled or controlled substance under the law, its use can still have consequences for public safety.

From a law enforcement perspective, impairment associated with kratom can be relevant to operating while intoxicated (OWI) enforcement. Local law enforcement reports multiple kratom-related OWI arrests in Dubuque over the past two years. Residents should not drive after using kratom or products containing 7-OH because they may be impaired.

Recognizing dependence and withdrawal

Regular kratom use can lead to tolerance and physical dependence. Signs of possible dependence include:

- Needing increasingly larger doses to achieve the same effect.
- Feeling anxious, irritable, or physically unwell between doses.
- Repeatedly trying and failing to reduce or stop use.
- Spending excessive time obtaining or using kratom.
- Continuing to use kratom despite harm to health, relationships, work, or daily life.

“Seeking help early for kratom use and dependence can help prevent serious health complications. The FDA has provided warnings of potential adverse effects, such as liver toxicity and seizures. We hope with early education, recognition and access to care and support can reduce potentially negative health effects, leading to better health outcomes,” said Sarah Milner, Public Health Project Coordinator and lead of the Dubuque County Substance Use Disorder Working Group.

Milner emphasized the importance of recognizing the signs of dependence and connecting people with support before their substance use becomes a crisis.

What residents should know and do

Dubuque County Public Health encourages residents to take the following precautions:

- **Avoid concentrated or synthetic 7-OH products.** Do not assume these products are safe because they are sold legally or marketed as supplements, herbal products, or natural remedies.
- **Recognize the risk of dependence.** Regular use can lead to tolerance, physical dependence, and withdrawal.



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- **Do not drive while impaired.** Kratom can affect judgment, alertness, and the ability to drive safely.
- **Take overdose symptoms seriously.** Call 911 if someone is unresponsive, having a seizure, or experiencing difficulty breathing. If an opioid-type overdose is suspected, administer naloxone if available and follow emergency dispatcher instructions. Naloxone may not reverse all effects of kratom or 7-OH.
- **Contact Poison Help for exposure concerns.** Call 1-800-222-1222 for guidance about possible poisoning or an adverse reaction.
- **Seek support early.** People concerned about their kratom use, dependence, or withdrawal can contact local treatment providers or Your Life Iowa for confidential support.

For immediate crisis support, call or text **988**. For confidential, 24/7 substance-use and behavioral health support, contact **Your Life Iowa at 855-581-8111** or text **855-895-8398**.

Local treatment and support resources

This list may not include all available services.

Area Substance Abuse Council (ASAC)

1940 Elm Street, Dubuque, IA 52001
563-582-3784

Hillcrest Family Services

2005 Asbury Road, Dubuque, IA 52001
563-583-7357

MercyOne Dubuque Turning Point Treatment Center

250 Mercy Drive, Dubuque, IA 52001
563-589-8291

Operation Empower Liberty Recovery Community

2216 White Street, Dubuque, IA 52001
563-213-5552

“Kratom is often perceived as a safe alternative to opioids, alcohol, or other substances, but we’re seeing more people seek treatment after finding themselves dependent on it in ways they never expected. If you’re concerned about your use or struggling to cut back, don’t wait for a crisis to seek help. The earlier someone reaches out, the better the opportunity for recovery,” said Courtney Runde, Director of MercyOne Dubuque Turning Point Treatment Center.

Dubuque County Public Health is incorporating kratom and other commonly misused substances into its prevention, education, and community partnership efforts. The goal is to increase awareness of the risks, encourage early intervention, and connect residents with appropriate care and support.

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