



# Substance Use Trend *Alert*

December 2021

## Kratom Use in the U.S. and Florida

Kratom is an herbal extract that comes from the leaves of a tropical tree (*Mitragyna speciosa*) native to Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> There's a variety of ways to use kratom. It can be brewed into a tea, chewed, smoked, and taken by capsules.<sup>2</sup> Consuming low doses of kratom acts as a stimulant that increases alertness and physical energy.<sup>1-3</sup> Higher doses of kratom produce opioid-like effects.<sup>3</sup> It's reported to help reduce pain and may bring on euphoria.<sup>1</sup> Its use as an herbal supplement has grown in popularity in recent years as a mood enhancer and energy booster and also among people who take kratom to avoid symptoms of opioid withdrawal.<sup>1,3</sup> However, popularity of the substance has brought attention to deaths in which kratom use was detected.<sup>4</sup>

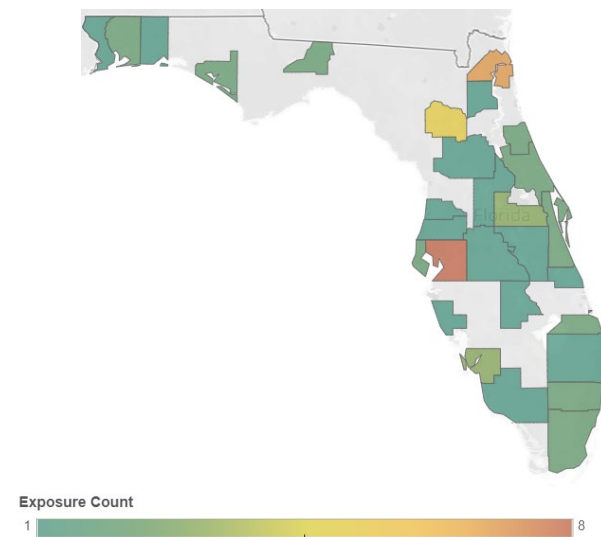
### Kratom Use in the U.S.

Kratom is currently not illegal in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> However, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has named it a drug of concern due to its abuse potential.<sup>3</sup> During 2011-2017, there were 1,807 calls to poison control centers in the U.S. concerning reported exposure to kratom.<sup>5</sup> About half of these calls resulted in serious outcomes involving use of kratom including seizures, high blood pressure and even reports of deaths.<sup>1</sup> Data analyzed from the State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System between July 2016 through December 2017 found 152 decedents tested positive for kratom in toxicology reports in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> Kratom was determined the cause of death among 91 of the 152 decedents nationally.<sup>5</sup>

### Kratom Use in Florida

The Florida Poison Control Centers reports types of exposure to drugs of abuse.<sup>6</sup> The number of exposures to kratom in 2017 was 34 and by 2019 it reached 76 exposures.<sup>6</sup> Figure 1 represents kratom

exposures by county. The total number of kratom exposures decreased to 60 in 2020.<sup>6</sup> In 2018, many districts voluntarily reported deaths associated with kratom to the Florida Medical Examiners Commission.<sup>7</sup> There were 85 occurrences of deaths with kratom in 2018 and 82 occurrences in 2019.<sup>7</sup> Reporting kratom by all districts began in 2020. There were 246 occurrences with kratom reported.<sup>7</sup>



[Florida Poison Control](#)

### Recommendations

More research on kratom is needed to understand its opioid-like effects, for its potential abuse properties, and safety and risks of mixing kratom with medicines and other substances.<sup>4</sup> The type and number of substances detected in kratom-involved deaths can help with prevention strategies for overdoses.<sup>5</sup> Regulation of kratom products with accurate labeling is recommended so that products are not contaminated.<sup>4</sup> For more information, see additional Information Sources.

### Additional Information Sources:

[Florida Health: Kratom](#)

[Kratom DrugFacts](#)

### References

1. Mayo Clinic (2020). Kratom: Unsafe and ineffective. Retrieved on 10-19-21 from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/consumer-health/in-depth/kratom/art-20402171>
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4. Henningfield, J. E., Grundmann, O., Babin, J. K., Fant, R. V., Wang, D. W., Cone, E. C., (2019). Risk of Death Associated with Kratom Use Compared to Opioids. *Preventative Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2019.105851>
5. Olsen E. O., O'Donnell J., Mattson C. L., Schier J. G., Wilson N. (2019). Notes from the Field: Unintentional Drug Overdose Deaths with Kratom Detected- 27 states, July 2016-December 2017. *MMWR Morbidity Mortal Weekly Rep* 2019; 68: 326-327 [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6814a2.htm?s\\_cid=mm6814a2\\_x](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6814a2.htm?s_cid=mm6814a2_x)
6. Florida Poison Control Centers (2021). Florida Poison Control Center Networks Statistics. Retrieved on 10-19-21 from <https://floridapoisoncontrol.org/poisoning-data/>
7. Florida Department of Law Enforcement (2021). Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons by Florida Medical Examiners. <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MEC/Publications-and-Forms/Documents/Drugs-in-Deceased-Persons/2020-Annual-Drug-Report-FINAL.aspx>