

NEWS | BAY AREA & STATE

This Bay Area teen was set to go to college. Then he discovered ‘gas station heroin.’

Synthetic kratom is exploding in California, leading to overdoses and fears of a new opioid crisis



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Life-destroying addiction can start at a corner store

A patient, his doctor and other experts warn of dangers of 7-OH, which is touted as a 'safer' alternative to heroin but jacks far more opioid danger

Local News

Kratom Products Linked to Overdoses, Addiction in Santa Barbara County

Public Health official warns that people 'need to be very, very cautious' of the unregulated products



July 29, 2025

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to warn you about an opioid that few physicians may be aware of. It's called 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH).

7-OH is found in trace amounts in the kratom plant leaf. But this is not our focus. Our primary concern is the concentrated form of 7-OH. This is an important distinction. These concentrated 7-OH opioid products are far more dangerous than traditional kratom leaf products.

Concentrated 7-OH products have exploded in popularity in recent years, with vape shops, gas stations and corner stores selling pills, gummies, candies, and even eye-catching products like ice cream cones containing 7-OH. You may also see 7-OH referred to as 7-OHMG, 7-Hydroxy, 7-HMG, or 7. Additionally, some kratom leaf products marketed as "spiked" or "enhanced" may contain 7-OH at a level 500% higher than would be naturally expected in kratom leaf.

Notably, [one study](#) in the Journal of Medicinal Chemistry found 7-OH to be 13 times more potent than morphine. Aside from addiction, 7-OH side effects include withdrawal symptoms, insomnia and anxiety, seizures, and fatal respiratory depression. The FDA is seeing increases in adverse events and related reports to poison control and is concerned about the growth of 7-OH product sales nationwide. We have already issued warning letters to several firms for illegally distributing 7-OH products and are working alongside our partners at the DEA to move forward with adding certain 7-OH products to the controlled substances schedules.

Like many physicians, I find it painful to recall the many opioid prescriptions I wrote in the early 2000s for routine procedures, unaware of the high potential for abuse. Our recognition of the abuse potential and our delayed response as a medical community resulted in a national health crisis. Let's not get caught flat footed again. In addition to the FDA's ongoing regulatory activities and education efforts, I appreciate your vigilance on this issue.

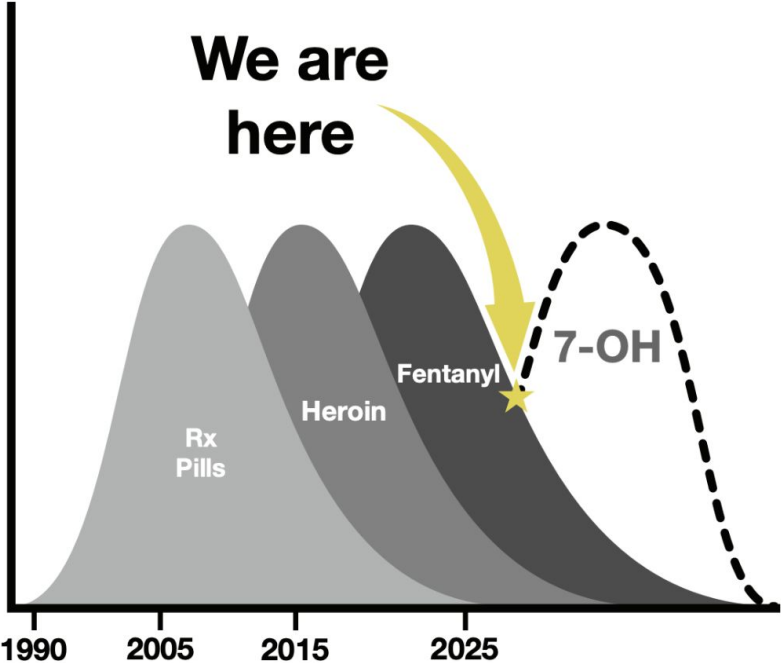
For more information, please refer to our new report and educational resources, which can be found at www.fda.gov/7-OH.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Makary".

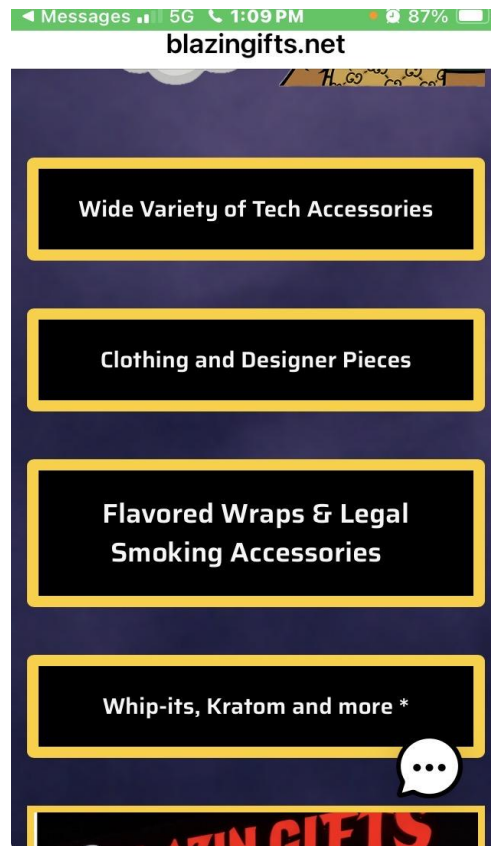
Martin A. Makary, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner of Food and Drugs

The Opioid Epidemic is Evolving with 7-OH. We Can and Must Act Now to Prevent a New Wave.



Note: The next potential phase of the opioid crisis may be defined by the emergence of novel synthetic opioids like 7-OH, combined with an increasing prevalence of concurrent use of opioids and other controlled substances.





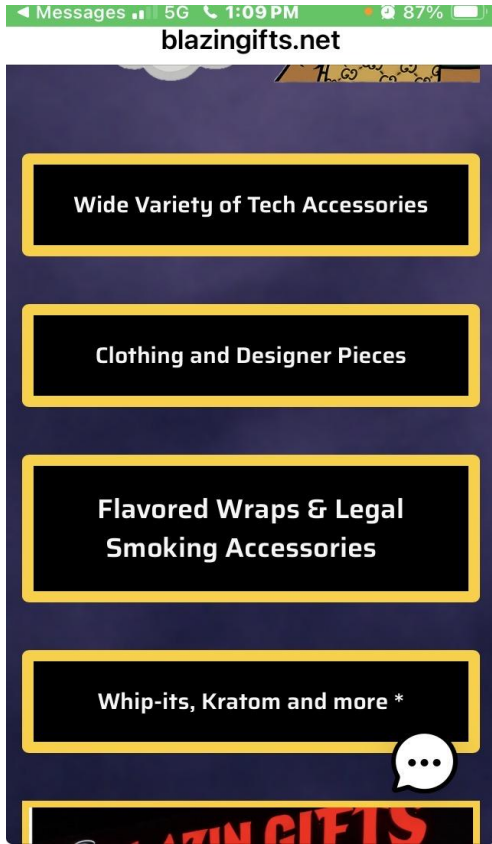
August, 2025

Reliance on State Authorities Creating a Public Safety Bottleneck

- **Lack of Clear Statutes:** With no comprehensive statewide law specifically regulating or banning Kratom and 7-OH, County authorities operate in a frustrating legal gray area. Due to a lack of state legislation, local jurisdictions are unable to act decisively on their own, and local health and law enforcement are left to rely on state agencies for assistance.
- **Improvised Oversight:** As of early 2026, California escalated its enforcement against Kratom—particularly products containing the highly concentrated compound 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH). Rather than waiting for new statewide laws to pass, the state is using existing food and drug safety laws to try to remove these products from retail shelves. Local agencies can report non-compliant stores to the state for heavy enforcement, but the state has stated that it must triage resources.

The Ultimate Cost: An Unacceptable Public Health Risk

- **Slow Response Times:** Coordinating enforcement between state agencies and local county departments inevitably causes significant delays in oversight.
- **Unregulated Shelves:** During these administrative delays, unregulated products sit quietly in local retail shops and convenience stores.
- **Public Health Threat:** Customers face exposure to products with highly variable potencies, zero standardized manufacturing oversight, and well-documented links to severe addiction and overdose.
- **In the future the State may pass legislation to carve out exceptions which will pre-empt the County Ordinance, if adopted. At that time the County Ordinance may be amended. But until that time, it is an unacceptable risk to the community, especially youth, to leave these products unregulated locally. This ordinance is a natural sister companion ordinance to the whip-it ordinance recently passed by the Board.**



August, 2025

April 19, 2026

San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
400 County Center
Redwood City, CA 94063

Dear President and Members of the Board of Supervisors,

I am writing to express strong support for the proposed ordinance banning the sale and distribution of kratom and 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) products in San Mateo County.

I am a professor at Stanford University. My lab focuses on understanding and reducing adolescent and young adult substance use, including emerging and poorly regulated products that are aggressively marketed to youth. The ordinance correctly recognizes that kratom and especially concentrated or synthetic 7-OH products can cause significant adverse health effects, including addiction, severe respiratory depression, and death, and that these products are widely available in locations easily accessed by youth such as gas stations and smoke shops. The lack of clear labeling, standardized dosing, and meaningful regulation leaves adolescents and young adults particularly vulnerable to unintentional high-dose exposure and polysubstance use.

I am especially concerned that these highly potent opioid-like products are being sold in various forms (e.g., gummies, shots, drink mixes) and with marketing strategies that mirror those used for nicotine and cannabis products that have driven youth experimentation and harm. As we have seen with e-cigarettes and other substances, once these products become normalized and embedded in youth culture, prevention becomes far more difficult and costly. [Taking action](#) now to remove kratom and 7-OH products from retail settings in San Mateo County is a prudent, evidence-informed step to prevent another wave of youth substance-related morbidity and mortality.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to adopt the ordinance adding Chapter 4.128 to the San Mateo County Ordinance Code to prohibit the sale and distribution of kratom and 7-OH products. This ordinance will help close dangerous regulatory gaps and will align local policy with emerging federal and state public health warnings, while directly protecting the health and safety of young people and all residents of San Mateo County.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to proactive policies that protect youth and community health. I would be pleased to serve as a resource to the County as you consider and implement this important measure.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Halpern-Felsher, PhD, FSAHM
Marron and Mary Elizabeth Kendrick Professor in Pediatrics II
Director, [Stanford REACH Lab](#)

Founder and Executive Director of our FREE Drug Education, Prevention, and Intervention Curriculums: