

Young people are buying drugs online, perhaps now more than ever. Transactions often occur on the so-called “dark web” – a part of the internet you can only access using a special anonymous browser and the virtual currency, Bitcoin. Because of the anonymity, sites on the dark web are harder for law enforcement to shut down.

One substance that is relatively easy to order on the internet is kratom. Kratom is a tropical tree native to Southeast Asia, with leaves that contain compounds that can have mind-altering effects. Most people take kratom as a pill, capsule, or extract, though some people chew kratom leaves or brew the dried or powdered leaves as a tea. The leaves can also be smoked or eaten in food. Kratom is sometimes sold as a green powder in packets labeled "not for human consumption", or as an extract or gum. Other names for kratom include Biak, Ketum, Kakuam, Ithang, and Thom.

The Effects of Kratom

Kratom can cause effects similar to both opioids and stimulants. Two compounds in kratom leaves interact with opioid receptors in the brain, producing sedation, pleasure, and decreased pain, especially when users consume large amounts of the plant. One compound also interacts with other receptor systems in the brain to produce stimulant effects. When kratom is taken in small amounts, users report increased energy, sociability, and alertness instead of sedation. However, kratom can also cause uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous side effects. These may include nausea, itching, sweating, dry mouth, constipation, increased urination, loss of appetite, seizures, and hallucinations. Symptoms of psychosis have been reported in some users.

There have been multiple reports of deaths in people who had ingested kratom, though most involved additional substances. In 2017, the FDA identified at least 44 deaths related to kratom, with at least one case investigated as possible use of pure kratom. The FDA reports note that many of the kratom-associated deaths appeared to have resulted from adulterated products or taking kratom with other potent substances, including illicit drugs, opioids, benzodiazepines, alcohol, gabapentin, and over-the-counter medications such as cough syrup. Also, there have been some reports of kratom packaged as dietary supplements or dietary ingredients that were laced with other compounds that caused deaths.

Like other drugs with opioid-like effects, kratom might cause dependence, which means users will feel physical withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking the drug. Some users have reported becoming addicted to kratom.

In recent years, kratom has also been used as an herbal alternative to medical treatment in attempts to control withdrawal symptoms and cravings caused by addiction to opioids or alcohol. However, there is no scientific evidence that kratom is either effective or safe for this purpose.

Here are a few ways you can protect your kids and prevent them from purchasing drugs online:

1. Keep the communication lines open.
2. Make sure they understand the consequences of substance use.
3. Review their internet search history.
4. Monitor their delivered packages.

For more information, please visit our website at www.drugfreeadamscounty.org.