

Another drug off the shelves in the interest of safety: Alton bans kratom

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ALTON – The Alton City Council has banned the sale and possession of a controversial substance called “kratom” within city limits.

Kratom is an herb native to Southeast Asia, where it has become illegal in many nations there due to addiction. Addiction, however, is exactly what many kratom users claim is the drug's biggest benefit. In high doses, the substance is said to mirror the qualities of an opiate without many of the devastating side effects. Because of its current status, however, it is not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, which has caused

several issues with the drug, including non-standard dosage and even a salmonella outbreak.

Those reasons are not why its sale is banned in Alton, however, Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons said Thursday morning. He said several kids in the area have been getting sick from ingesting it. He said the substance makes kids lethargic, adding users “fall out,” and are even feeling overall malaise from ingesting the substance.

“It is a very dangerous substance,” Simmons said. “That is why we have banned its sale in Alton, and we encourage other areas around here to do the same thing.”

Simmons dispatched officers to local business, The Cave, which sells large amounts of the substance, to alert them to the new law. As of Thursday, no business in Alton is allowed to sell kratom and violations of the ordinance may result in fines and even the suspension of the establishment's business license.

“It's no different than when people were selling bath salts,” Simmons said. “Kids died of that, including one in Alton, so when a dangerous substance threatens to hurt our kids, we're going to do everything we can to get it out of our town.”

No one has died of kratom, but www.drugabuse.gov lists the following as side effects of kratom use:

- Sensitivity to sunburn
- Nausea
- Itching
- Sweating
- Dry Mouth
- Constipation
- Increased Urination
- Loss of Appetite

Psychotic symptoms have also been reported in some users. The site confirms kratom on its own is not associated with any fatal overdoses, but adds commercial forms of the drug are sometimes laced with other compounds known to have caused deaths.

Secondary use of kratom has been suspected in a limited amount of deaths, which were ultimately caused by severe hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy, according to the FDA's warning against using the drug. It also highly recommends against using it as an alternative to opioids or in an effort to curb addiction.

The FDA, while not regulating kratom, does warn high usage can result in chronic liver damage and jaundice, and the drug has been banned in several other states, but not yet in Illinois.

As far as addiction, the site said the substance can cause dependence with heavy users reporting muscles aches, insomnia, irritability, emotional changes and a runny nose.

Kratom is often made into a tea, but leaves are also eaten or smoked. The leaves are used for their mood-lifting effects, but are also used for pain relief and an aphrodisiac. The main compounds in the substance are mitragynine and 7-hydroxymitragynine. Those compounds interact in the brain, producing sedation, pleasure and decreased pain. Mitragynine may also interact with other receptor systems in the brain to produce stimulant effects.

Behavioral therapies and medications have not specifically been tested for treatment of kratom addiction, and there are no solid studies linking kratom use to assistance with opioid dependency, which is often claimed through anecdotal evidence.

“They can argue that it helps addiction all they want,” Simmons said. “I am listening to what the medical professionals say, and they say it is a dangerous substance for our kids.”