

2024



Kava Coalition Backgrounder

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Executive Summary

Kava Coalition was established to advance the general understanding of kava - made from the root of the kava plant and the main ingredient in kava beverages. We advocate for the industry and beyond, with a focus on up-to-date, realistic regulation that reflects current scientific knowledge, promote educational materials on kava's uses and potential benefits. Through these efforts we aim to preserve the history and cultural heritage surrounding kava –toward a future where kava is reliably manufactured, understood, and accessible.

The following information – on consumption and products, farming and cultivation, myths and misconceptions, kava's safety profile, and the current legal landscape – demonstrates the passion and sincerity we bring to our work.



About Kava Coalition

Kava Coalition is an alliance of kava consumers, experts, and industry leaders committed to advancing kava education, advocacy, and choice. Our mission is to empower individuals with accurate information about kava, its diverse uses, and its potential benefits to promote responsible and knowledgeable consumption choices.

We understand the importance of preserving kava's history and cultural heritage. Through educational initiatives and community engagement, we promote awareness and appreciation for kava's traditional practices and cultural significance.

Simultaneously, we advocate for modern regulation that reflects current scientific knowledge, ensuring consumer safety and product integrity. Kava Coalition is dedicated to creating a future where kava is widely recognized, understood, and accessible to those who seek its benefits.



Initiatives

Our commitment to advancing kava advocacy, education, and good manufacturing practices – and thereby support informed consumer choice – is at the core of everything we do.

Advocacy

Through our advocacy efforts we aim to empower individual consumers, promote responsible practices, and ensure the safety and accessibility of kava products. We actively engage with lawmakers, government agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure the interests of kava consumers and the industry are represented.

Consumers' involvement and support are vital to driving meaningful change.



Education

We offer a range of resources, articles, and publications to promote general understanding and safe use of kava.

Our website's resources include:

- Our [blog](#) about kava, its diverse uses, and potential benefits.
- [Answers to common questions](#) around kava history, farming, consumption, regulations, and more.
- [Videos](#) exploring a traditional kava ceremony in Vanuatu, the origins and commercialization of kava, and featured discussions of kava in popular media.
- [Research](#) papers, published over decades, on kava and its effects on various aspects of health.
- [News](#) on kava research and standards.
- analyses that highlight the [safety](#) of kava when compared to that of other commonly used substances.
- [Featured studies](#), by the World Health Organization and others, regarding kava.
- Relevant [articles](#) by the Pacific Horticultural & Agricultural Market Access (PHAMA) Plus Program, which works with Pacific island countries to manage regulation associated with exporting primary and value-added products.

Good Manufacturing Practices

Kava Coalition prioritizes the safety and quality of kava products by advocating for, and adhering to, rigorous standards and following good manufacturing practices (GMPs).

GMPs are guidelines and standards established by regulatory authorities to ensure the consistent quality, safety, and efficacy of products. These practices encompass various aspects of the production process including sourcing, manufacturing, packaging, labeling, and storage.

GMP compliance is essential for the kava industry to demonstrate a commitment to product safety, purity, and reliability. Adhering to GMPs provides several benefits:

Consumer Safety

Compliance ensures that kava products are manufactured in a manner that minimizes the risk of contamination, adulteration, or other potential health hazards.

Product Quality

GMPs help maintain consistent quality throughout the manufacturing process, from sourcing and processing to packaging and labeling. This ensures that consumers receive reliable and effective kava products.

Regulatory Compliance

Adhering to GMPs helps businesses meet regulatory requirements and demonstrates a commitment to compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Our Commitment to GMPs

Kava Coalition is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of product safety and quality. We work closely with kava producers, manufacturers, and vendors to promote GMP compliance throughout the kava supply chain.

Our specific GMP guidelines include:

- **Sourcing and traceability:** We emphasize the importance of sourcing kava from reputable and reliable suppliers who adhere to sustainable cultivation practices. We encourage traceability measures to ensure transparency and accountability in the supply chain.
- **Facility and equipment:** We advocate for proper facilities and equipment to support hygienic and controlled manufacturing environments. This includes adequate sanitation practices, controlled temperature and humidity, and appropriate storage conditions.
- **Quality control and testing:** We promote regular quality control measures, including raw material testing, in-process testing, and finished product testing, to verify the identity, purity, and potency of kava products. This helps identify and mitigate any potential contaminants or adulterants.
- **Documentation and record-keeping:** We emphasize the importance of comprehensive documentation and record-keeping throughout the manufacturing process. This includes maintaining batch records, standard operating procedures, and quality control documentation.
- **Training and personnel:** We encourage training programs for employees involved in the manufacturing and handling of kava products. Proper training ensures that personnel are knowledgeable about GMP requirements and can execute their responsibilities effectively.

Furthermore, to reinforce our commitment to GMP compliance, we support and encourage third-party auditing and certification programs. These programs provide independent verification of compliance, giving consumers confidence in the quality and safety of kava products.

Our Supporters



PACIFIKAVA™



Pacific Horticultural & Agricultural Market Access Plus Program
Supported by Australia and New Zealand

Vanuatu Kava Industry Association (VKIA)



About Kava

Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is a plant native to the South Pacific, where it has traditionally been used for ceremonial, social, and medicinal purposes, owing to its relaxing and anxiolytic (anxiety-reducing) properties.

Kava is traditionally prepared by grinding the root or rhizome of the plant and mixing it with water to create a beverage. Kava is also used as an ingredient in herbal supplements to assist with occasional stress and anxiety.



Consumption & Products

Kava can promote a sense of well-being and may help with occasional stress and anxiety reduction. Notably, however, different types of kava can vary in their chemotype, which may influence their effects. Some are known more for their calming effects while others may be more uplifting or sociable, for example.

When used responsibly and in moderation, kava is generally considered safe for most people. It is important to follow recommended dosage guidelines. Kava is not considered addictive, but as with all substances that make you feel good, moderation is key.

Some people may experience mild side effects, such as dizziness, drowsiness, or upset stomach. Allergic reactions and liver issues have been reported in rare cases linked to excessive or prolonged use of low-quality kava (read more [here](#)).

You can find kava products in health food stores, online retailers, and specialty kava bars. It's essential to buy from reputable sources to ensure product quality and safety. Look for products that are third-party tested and check for the presence of harmful contaminants. Quality kava is typically made from the root or rhizome of the plant.

Kava should be stored in a cool, dark, and dry place. It's best to keep it sealed to prevent moisture and air from degrading its quality.

Kava Bars

Kava bars or lounges are more than places to enjoy a unique beverage—they are cultural hubs designed for relaxation and connection. Designed to provide a retreat from the fast-paced world, kava bars around the country are a place for patrons to unwind and engage with others in natural and meaningful ways.

Menus generally feature various kava cultivars, each with its own flavor profile and potency. From earthy to peppery notes, the diverse offerings cater to different preferences. Some kava bars may also feature herbal drinks or snacks, enhancing the overall experience.

Kava Coalition maintains a [directory of kava bars](#) on our website.

Learn more by watching our video about kava bars and kava culture in the United States:



People visit kava bars for a variety of reasons. Among the most popular are a desire to **discover natural ways to unwind and find a sense of community.**

Kava bars offer a connection to nature and tradition in a modern setting, allowing people to **explore the functional power of plants and evolve their way of being.**

Farming & Cultivation



Kava is grown primarily in the South Pacific, in countries including Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, and Papua New Guinea, which provide the tropical climate (temperatures between 70-95°F or 21-35°C) and well-drained, loamy soil that the plant's growth requires.

Farming involves selecting the right location, preparing the soil, planting kava cuttings or seedlings, maintaining the crop, harvesting the mature roots, and processing them for consumption. Kava plants typically take about 3 to 5 years to mature, at which point the roots can be harvested by uprooting the entire plant and then separating the root from the aerial parts.

In traditional kava-growing cultures, the harvesting of kava roots is often a communal activity, involving rituals and ceremonies to show respect for the plant's significance.

After harvesting, kava roots are typically cleaned, peeled, and ground into a powder, which is then used to make kava beverages or herbal supplements.

Sustainable kava farming involves crop rotation, soil conservation, and responsible harvesting to ensure the long-term health of the plant and the environment. Organic farming practices are becoming more popular in kava cultivation.



History & Tradition



The history of kava consumption dates back thousands of years. It is believed to have originated in the South Pacific, where kava has been used for ceremonial, social, and medicinal purposes.

For some indigenous communities, kava plays a central role in promoting community bonds and establishing a sense of unity. In South Pacific cultures more broadly, the plant is regarded as a symbol of peace, hospitality, and goodwill, used to welcome guests, resolve disputes, and mark significant life events.

The kava ceremony is a significant cultural practice in many South Pacific societies, where it often involves rituals, chants, and a specific order of serving kava as a sign of respect and unity.

Different communities in the South Pacific have their own kava traditions and customs. Various kava and preparation methods may be used in Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa, and other regions.

Over the years, the way kava is consumed has evolved. Modern kava consumption include kava extracts, capsules, and even sparkling beverages. However, traditional preparation and consumption methods are still practiced in many places. In the U.S. and other “Western” cultures, kava has gained popularity as a relaxation aid and alternative to alcohol, mostly through the emergence of kava bars and lounges.

South Pacific communities, organizations like Kava Coalition, and others around the world are working to preserve kava culture and history through education, research, and cultural exchange initiatives.

Myths & Misinformation

Many misunderstandings about kava – that it is a narcotic, that it is damaging to the liver or addictive, that it was widely banned over safety concerns – damage the public’s knowledge of kava’s history, cultural use, and modern use.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, several case reports of hepatotoxicity and liver failure were causally linked to using kava supplements in Germany. In response to these reports, the World Health Organization designated a committee in 2007 to assess the risk of hepatotoxicity associated with kava products. This assessment concluded that “the condemnation of kava extracts appears unwarrantable.”¹

An additional study on the safety of both traditional and recreational use of kava was undertaken by the WHO in 2016, and found that heavy kava consumption’s most significant health effects were a scaly skin rash (kava dermopathy) and elevated gamma-glutamyl transferase (GGT; a liver enzyme) levels. Both conditions reversed upon cessation of kava use. The study concluded that “it is possible for kava beverage[s] to be consumed with an acceptably low level of health risk; however, further studies are needed to define the parameters necessary to ensure safe use of the beverage.”²

These reports, as well as a 2002 Cochrane Collaboration review, highlight that adverse effects from kava consumption were infrequent, often mild, and not conclusively attributable to kava itself.

Since then, the misconception of kava's liver toxicity has been increasingly debunked. Further study has revealed that the cases of liver damage stemmed mostly from consumption of adulterated and/or low-quality products and extracts, which did not align with traditional methods of kava preparation. Countries like Germany eventually lifted their bans, acknowledging the lack of substantial evidence against kava.

¹ WHO (World Health Organization) Assessments of the Risk of Hepatotoxicity with Kava Products. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO Document Production Services; 2007.

² WHO. Kava: A Review of the Safety of Traditional and Recreational Beverage Consumption. Volume 1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation; Rome, Italy: 2016. pp. 1–35.

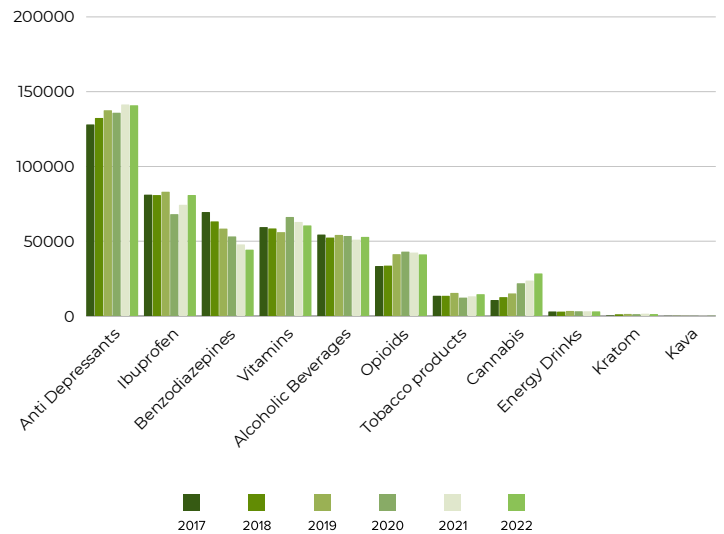
Safety Profile

To further illustrate the relative safety of kava, we can quantify its risks alongside those of other, popular substances.

Regarding liver damage, in particular, kava’s toxicity rate has been calculated at 0.23 cases per 1 million daily doses. In contrast, diazepam, a benzodiazepine widely prescribed for anxiety, has a toxicity rate of 2.12 cases per 1 million daily doses.³ And acetaminophen, the active ingredient in many over-the-counter pain-relieving and cold/flu drugs, is the leading cause of acute liver failure in the U.S., while kava alone carries no reported incidents of acute liver failure, per the Food and Drug Administration’s Adverse Events Reporting System Public Dashboard.

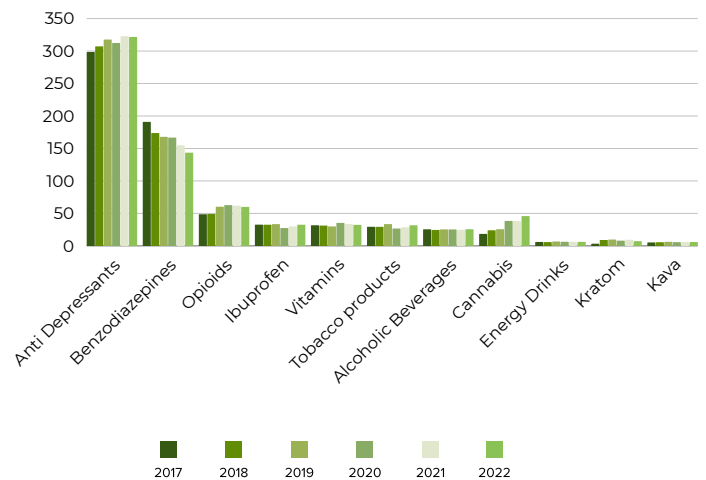
More broadly, data on calls to U.S. Poison Control Centers tally adverse events involving kava alongside those for substances like ibuprofen, vitamins, alcoholic beverages, opioids, tobacco products, and cannabis. The first chart presents the total number of calls regarding each substance, while the second reflects the rate of calls made per 100,000 users of each substance, to account for the fact that kava’s use in the U.S. pales in comparison to the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, say.

Poison Center Calls Per Substance 2017-2022



Source: American Association of Poison Control Centers

Poison Center Calls per 100K Users 2017-2022



Source: American Association of Poison Control Centers

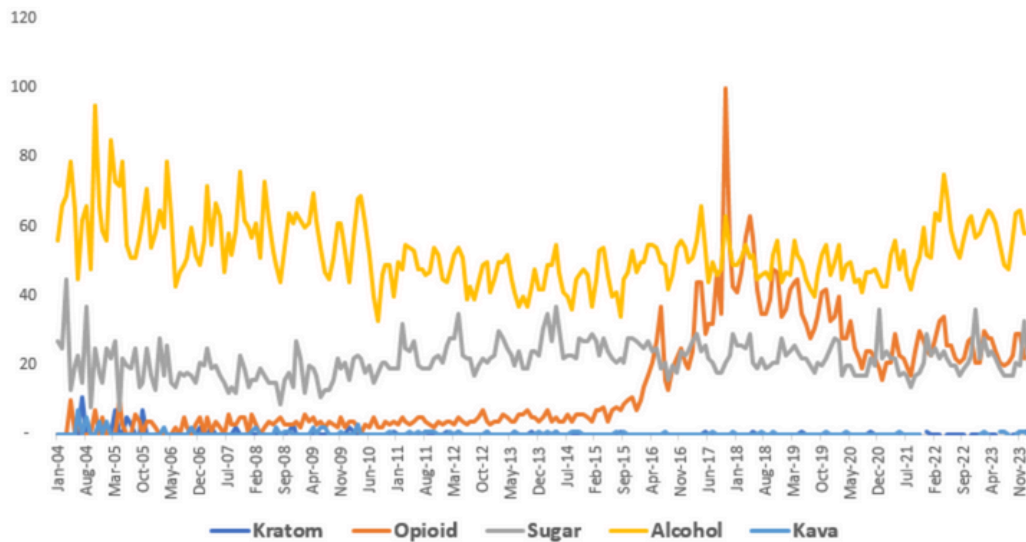
³ Schmidt M, Morgan M, Bone K, et al.(2005) Kava: A risk-benefit assessment. In: Mills S, Bone K (eds) The Essential Guide to Herbal Safety, St. Louis, MO: Elsevier, Churchill, Livingstone, pp. 155–221.

Safety Profile

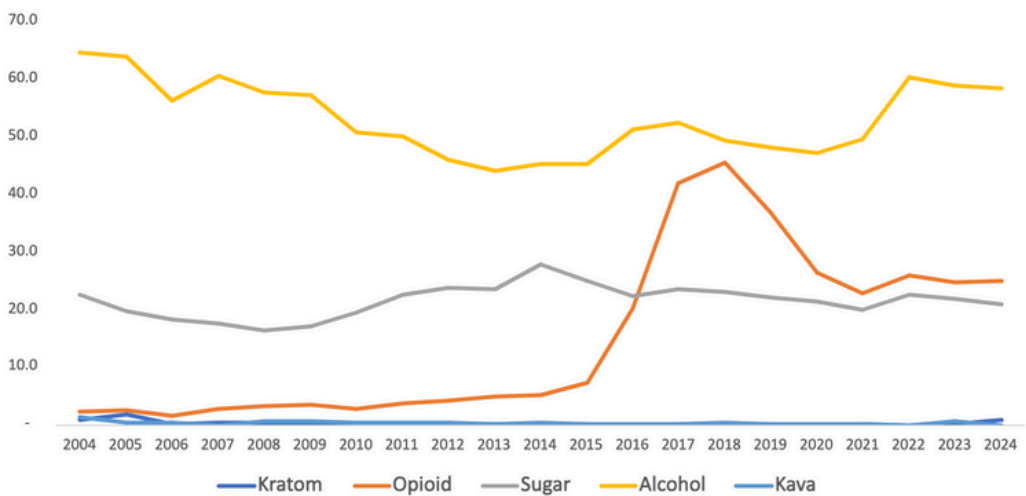
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Furthermore, Google search results since 2004 help testify to the public’s concern over any so-called “kava addiction” versus that of other, popular substances.

Addiction Searches on Google (2004-2024)



Addiction Searches on Google (2004-2024)



Source: Google

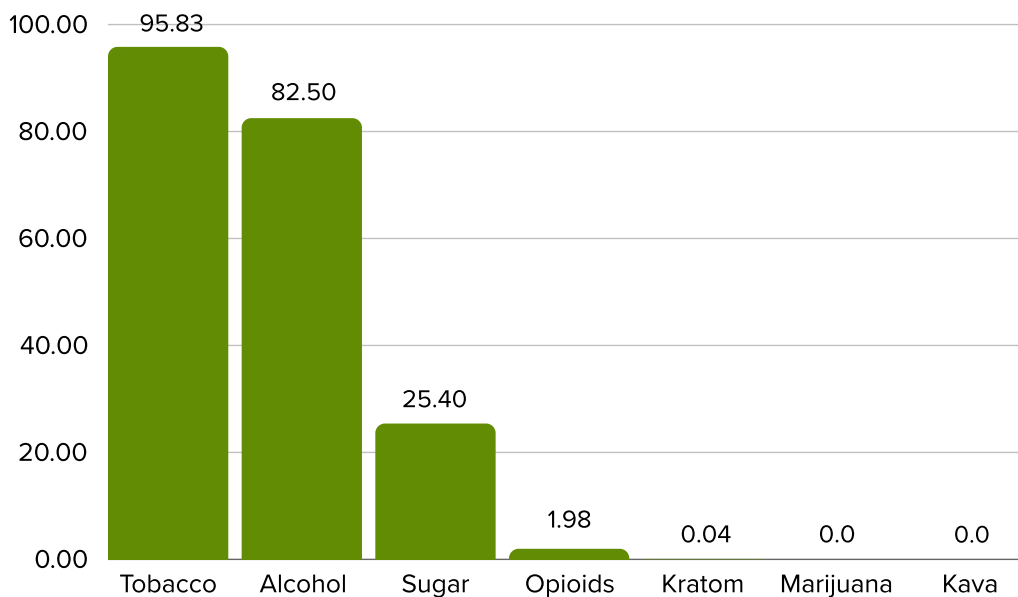
Safety Profile

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And when reviewing mortality data from the FDA Adverse Event Reporting System (FAERS), the CFSAN Adverse Event Reporting System (CAERS), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), normalized per 100,000 users, it is apparent that in the context of overall substance use in the U.S., kava presents a much lower risk of associated mortality than alcohol, tobacco, sugar, or opioids does.

Summary - Comparison Death Rates (2021)

Normalized per 100,000 users



Source: Nutrasource independent review of FAERS, CAERS, & CDC data, 2023

As with any plant-derived ingredient, the quality of the raw material is of the utmost importance when selecting a product. Any product derived from kava root should be tested for trace contaminants, pesticides, and mycotoxins. Consultation with a healthcare professional and in-depth examination of any pre-existing conditions or co-medications is necessary to ensure no additional risk is presented by kava consumption.



Regulations & Legalities

The legal status of kava varies from one country to another. In the U.S., kava is legal in all 50 states and is not regulated by any state or federal law.

In some countries, kava is regulated or restricted over concerns related to liver toxicity. As described above, these concerns have been debunked, which calls for regulators in such countries to reconsider kava's legal status.

Moving Forward

Toward remedying these legal inconsistencies and improving the general understanding around kava, its properties, its effects, its history, and its traditional uses, Kava Coalition's priority is furthering education and scientific research into the plant.

For all the research done on kava's alleged liver toxicity, much work remains to be done on the plant's overall profile and, in the words of the WHO, to "define the parameters necessary to ensure safe use" of kava products. This work should dictate manufacturers' practices, policymakers' regulations, and consumers' choices.