

Important Notice to Retail Businesses Regarding Kava

February 2026

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



KEY MESSAGES

- In March 2002, the federal Food and Drug Administration (**FDA**) issued an [advisory](#) to consumers informing them of the potential risk of severe liver injury associated with the use of kava-containing dietary supplements.
- In August 2020, the FDA published a [memorandum](#) which concluded that sufficient toxicological data demonstrated that kava is not safe for human consumption.
- In January 2026, the California Department of Public Health (**CDPH**) posted information on their [website](#) stating that under federal law, kava is not considered generally recognized as safe (**GRAS**). The FDA has deemed kava an unapproved food additive and prohibits its addition in conventional food, except for kava steeped in only water to brew tea and consumed as a single-ingredient conventional food.
- Los Angeles County, Department of Public Health (**Public Health**) will red-tag or impound any food or beverage product that contains kava as a food additive, with the exception of kava steeped in only water.
- Prepackaged, sealed dietary supplements with kava as an **ingredient**, are allowed to be sold if properly labeled as a dietary supplement, include a **Supplemental Facts** section, and do not make any health benefit claims.

What is Kava?

Kava is a plant (*Piper methysticum*) that is a member of the pepper family. It is also known as awa, ava, kawa, ava pepper, ava root, yati, and yaqona. The name “**kava**” is also commonly attributed to the beverage or herbal products derived or extracted from the rhizomes and root of the species *Piper methysticum*.

What is Kava used in?

Traditionally, kava root has been used in the Pacific Islands to make recreational and ceremonial drinks. Kava root's active ingredient, **kavalactones**, has **sedative** and **psychoactive properties**. Dietary supplements containing **kavalactones** are marketed to relieve anxiety, improve insomnia, etc. throughout the world, including the United States

What are the health risks associated with using Kava?

Reports of adverse effects from chronic and heavy consumption of kava-containing products have triggered world-wide public health concerns. These adverse effects include:

- Hepatotoxicity (liver injury)
- Vision impairment
- Rashes or dermatitis
- Nausea
- Seizures

What are the regulations for Kava in California?

Due to the health implications of the active ingredient, kavalactones, kava **cannot be used as the following:**

- **A Food Additive.** The FDA prohibits it from being added to any raw, cooked, or processed food because it **is not** generally recognized as safe (GRAS).
- **An approved Drug.** Products containing kava **cannot make health claims** because it has not been approved as a drug in the United States.

Can Kava be used as a dietary supplement in California?

Currently, kava can be used as an ingredient in a dietary supplement, **if all of the federal and state requirements have been met.** In addition, manufacturers of kava-containing dietary supplements must follow the dietary supplement **Current Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMPs)**, which include labeling. Information about regulations for Dietary Supplements can be found [here](#).

Which Kava related products CAN or CANNOT be sold?

Can be sold as:

- A prepackaged, sealed dietary supplement with Kava as an **ingredient**, that is properly labeled and includes a **Supplemental Facts** section, and does not make any health benefit claims.
- A brewed tea if kava is steeped in only water and consumed as a single-ingredient conventional food.

CANNOT be sold as:

- A prepackaged dietary supplement that has **been opened** and kava **added** to **any prepared food or drink** (other than only water) at the retail facility.
- A prepackaged food or drink product (other than a brewed tea with only water) that has **kava added** as an ingredient.

Public Health is **only authorized** to regulate food products that have been adulterated with these substances. Therefore, retail food facilities that add kava as an ingredient to beverages (except for kava steeped in only water and consumed as a single-ingredient conventional food) or other prepared items, will be marked as a major violation and subject to red-tag or impound by Public Health.

To report food items for retail sale that have been adulterated, contact the Customer Call Center at (888) 700-9995 or email to ehmail@ph.lacounty.gov.

For questions regarding dietary supplements, please contact the **CDPH Food and Drug Branch** at FDBcomplaints@cdph.ca.gov or at (916) 650-6500 or (800) 495-3232.

Resources:

- **FDA Consumer Advisory: Kava-Containing Dietary Supplements May be Associated With Severe Liver Injury:** <https://wayback.archive-it.org/7993/20170722144010/https://www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/SafetyAlerts/Advisories/ucm085482.htm>
- **FDA Memo: Review of the published literature pertaining to the safety of Kava for use in conventional foods:** <https://www.fda.gov/media/169556/download>
- **The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Food and Drug Branch (FDB) - Consumer Fact Sheet—Kava:** <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DFDCS/CDPH%20Document%20Library/FDB/FoodSafetyProgram/KavaFactSheet.pdf>