DEKALB COUNTY, Ga. - The state chief medical examiner says the herbal supplement kratom is killing people in Georgia.

Kratom is a controversial tree leaf that has opiate-like effects for those who consume it.

It is sold legally in stores and some people use it to treat depression, anxiety or chronic pain.

Dr. Jonathan Eisenstat, the GBI's chief state medical examiner, said kratom contributed to five deaths in 2016 and 11 deaths so far in 2017.

He said kratom isn't just showing up at convenience stores, supermarkets and other places where it's sold over the counter, it's now showing up in lab tests done for autopsies.

Eisenstat said of the kratom-related deaths in 2017, kratom was the sole drug that caused the death in two cases. It was found with one or more drugs in the rest of the deaths. He said in the five 2016 deaths, it was the sole drug in one case.

"In November of 2016, we added that to our list of possible drugs in our toxicology screens," Eisenstat said.

"Does that mean there could have been deaths that went unnoticed before that?" Channel 2's Mark Winne asked.

"That's correct," Eisenstat said.

Channel 2's Berndt Petersen spoke to a woman with a history of back problems who said kratom is the only thing that could treat the pain.

"It doesn't have a high feeling. It does have a mood enhancer. It makes you want to get up and do," she said.

Eisenstat said kratom is not an opioid, but acts on the same receptors in the brain.

Winne asked GBI officials if kratom is becoming a problem.

"They've been saying kratom has become a big problem for them because as they're trying to get people off opioids, which as you know is a huge problem, people are now turning to kratom as an alternative," GBI spokeswoman Nelly Miles said.

She said the GBI answers lots of questions from lawmakers about kratom, but right now it is legal under Georgia law. © 2017 Cox Media Group.