

# Drug abuse and drug situation in Hong Kong in first half of 2023

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) noted at its meeting today (September 14) the statistical figures of the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) and other drug-related figures in the first half of 2023. The ACAN noticed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first half of 2023 was higher than that for the same period in 2022, which was during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the society has resumed normalcy, there would be changes in the drug situation. The ACAN will closely monitor the situation in the second half of 2023, and will continue to take forward corresponding anti-drug work.

Figures from the CRDA revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first half of 2023 increased by 12 per cent (from 2 813 to 3 156) compared with that of the same period in 2022. The number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 declined by 13 per cent (from 421 to 368). The most common type of drugs abused in the first half of 2023 was heroin, followed by cocaine and then methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice"); while the most common type of drugs abused among reported young drug abusers aged under 21 was cocaine, followed by cannabis and then ketamine (commonly known as "K").

The ACAN is highly concerned about the cocaine (commonly known as "coke") abuse situation. In the first half of 2023, cocaine was the most common type of psychotropic substance abused. For the same period, cocaine was the most common type of drugs abused among reported young drug abusers aged under 21, with around half of them (52 per cent) having abused cocaine. In addition, when categorising arrests for drug offences by drug types, the number of persons arrested for offences related to cocaine was also the highest.

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Donald Li, said, "The global supply of cocaine has surged recently, and so has the number of reported cocaine abusers in Hong Kong. This situation is worrying. Members of the public should not be confused and lured by drug dealers who often tout cocaine as a symbol of being posh and trendy, or for successful professionals. High flyers never leverage on drugs to relieve stress or use them as entertainment. No drug is noble or humble as they are all illegal, and will ruin people's bodies and minds. We will launch a series of anti-drug education and publicity work to debunk all myths.

"Cocaine is highly addictive and will do countless harm, including causing unbearable itchiness, nasal damage, delirium, and even death. Cocaine can send its abusers into a quagmire of financial difficulties and physical, as well as psychological, addictions. No one should give it a try. However, we appeal to all to encourage those who are unfortunately suffering from drug addiction to seek early help from various drug treatment and rehabilitation

service units. Those in need may also call the 24-hour hotline 186 186 or send a message to 98 186 186 in WhatsApp and WeChat."

In order to enhance members of the public's understanding of the harm of cocaine, the Narcotics Division (ND) has produced an animated video, which is about how a young person with bright prospects had been controlled by his "inner demons" and paid a heavy price for one wrong decision: trying cocaine. The animated video has been uploaded onto the ND's website ([www.nd.gov.hk/en/cocaine\\_info.html](http://www.nd.gov.hk/en/cocaine_info.html)) as well as social media platforms (Facebook page and Instagram account of narcotics.divisionhk).

In addition to cocaine, Dr Li expressed concern over a recent rumour that drugs were suspected to be involved in post-secondary student activities in Hong Kong. He said, "Drugs have no place in a student's life. The ACAN expects tertiary institutions to step up anti-drug preventive education on campuses. Moreover, we also learned that the ND has approached different institutions, and will continue to provide universities, secondary schools and primary schools with appropriate anti-drug preventive education resources, with a view to safeguarding the drug-free culture on campuses."

He added, "A new school year has just begun. Students will make many new friends and participate in different social activities and overseas exchange programmes. Taking this opportunity, I would have to remind young people that they should not try drugs, including cannabis, out of curiosity or peer pressure, even if drugs are offered for free. While facing stress from daily life or study, one can build a healthy and positive lifestyle through sports or hobbies. Anyone suffering from emotional or mental problems should consult medical professionals or seek help from social workers. Remember, 'Let's Stand Firm. Knock Drugs Out!'"

According to the figures from law enforcement agencies, among all the drug offence cases concluded in courts in the first half of 2023, including drug trafficking cases involving young offenders aged under 21, the conviction rate was high and close to 90 per cent. The spokesman for the ND stressed that young age is not a valid mitigating factor and reminded that anyone who has committed a drug offence is liable for serious criminal punishment. Young people are urged not to put their future at risk out of greed, and participate in drug trafficking activities for money or resolving financial problems. Offenders of these crimes can never escape the long arm of the law. Offenders trafficking in less than 10 grams of cocaine could already be subject to two to five years of imprisonment.

The website of the ND ([www.nd.gov.hk](http://www.nd.gov.hk)) contains detailed information about drugs, including frequently asked questions about cocaine and cannabis for the public's reference. In addition, the figures of the CRDA for the first half of 2023 are also available on the website of the ND ([www.nd.gov.hk/en/crda\\_main\\_charts\\_and\\_tables.html](http://www.nd.gov.hk/en/crda_main_charts_and_tables.html)).