

Drug abuse and drug situation in Hong Kong in first three quarters of 2024

â€‹The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) noted at its meeting today (December 13) the statistical figures of the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) and other drug-related figures in the first three quarters of 2024. ACAN noticed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first three quarters of 2024 was lower than that for the first three quarters in 2023, whereas the number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 increased. ACAN will closely monitor the situation in the remaining quarter of 2024, and will carry out anti-drug work according to the latest situation.

Figures from the CRDA revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first three quarters of 2024 decreased by 9 per cent (from 4 485 to 4 082) when compared with that of 2023. The three most common types of drugs abused in the first three quarters of 2024 were heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice"). Nevertheless, the number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 in the first three quarters of 2024 increased from 538 to 593 when compared with the same period last year. Among these reported young drug abusers, 139 of them abused "space oil". In this group, the most common type of drugs abused was cannabis, followed by cocaine. Since the first half of 2024, "space oil" has continued to be the third most common type of drugs abused by young drug abusers aged under 21.

The Chairman of ACAN, Dr Donald Li, said "Without a doubt, vaping 'space oil' by e-cigarettes is the same as taking drugs. The abuse of etomidate, the main ingredient of 'space oil', could lead to addiction, memory loss, seizure, unconsciousness, and even death."

Dr Li reminds the public that they should never try "space oil" out of curiosity. It will cost one's health and career. He also called on the education and social welfare sectors to be vigilant about several signs of young people in the hope that early intervention can prevent the abuse situation from getting worse. These signs include possession of suspected e-cigarette products, and display of a vacant expression, an unsteady gait, unexplained bruises, etc.

Dr Li continued, "The Government has made it clear that it will step up the control of etomidate by amending the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance in the first quarter of next year. I welcome this initiative. No member of our society can get away from the problem of emerging drugs. We must take action by working together so that our younger generation would not fall prey to this new drug."

The Narcotics Division (ND) of the Security Bureau is highly concerned about the abuse of "space oil". It has adopted the suggestions from ACAN and launched education and publicity initiatives targeting "space oil" to enhance the public's abilities to protect themselves against this emerging drug. In

the second half of this year, the ND co-organised multiple exchange sessions with the Hospital Authority, social welfare service organisations and relevant government offices to help frontline social workers and teaching staff exercise extra vigilance against "space oil", and improve their capabilities for providing services to "space oil" abusers.

The ND and ACAN will launch a new TV Announcement in the Public Interest (API) on the theme of saying no to "space oil" abuse this month. Apart from this API, the ND will also broadcast a series of feature stories about "space oil". Through interviews with people from different sectors, including former drug abusers, professional social workers and a psychiatrist, these feature stories discuss the factors behind "space oil" abuse, the harmful effects caused by this new drug, the common misconceptions about "space oil" and the importance of promptly listing etomidate as a dangerous drug to protect the public from its abuse. Citizens are welcome to visit the ND's "space oil" dedicated webpage (www.nd.gov.hk/tc/space_oil.html), which contains a "space oil"-themed animated video and relevant information.

According to the statistical figures from the law enforcement agencies, the number of persons arrested for drug offences in the first three quarters of 2024 dropped by 9 per cent (from 2 615 to 2 386) when compared with that of 2023. The number of young arrestees aged under 21 decreased by 20 per cent (from 246 to 196). Cannabis, cocaine and methamphetamine were the main drugs involved in these arrests. According to the court cases concluded for the same period, the conviction rate of persons being prosecuted for drug offences was as high as nearly 90 per cent. As for young offenders aged under 21 who were sentenced to imprisonment for drug trafficking, more than half of them were sentenced to over five years in prison, and the longest period of imprisonment was 22 years. The ND reminds young people to remain vigilant against drugs when attending gatherings or travelling abroad during the long holidays in December. Never try drugs out of curiosity and never take part in drug trafficking activities out of greed. Otherwise, there will be lifelong regrets. Young age is not a valid mitigating factor. Anyone who commits a drug offence is liable for serious criminal punishment. The maximum penalty for drug trafficking is life imprisonment and a fine of \$5 million.

In addition, the ND reminds members of the public again that cannabidiol (CBD) has been listed as a dangerous drug since February 1, 2023. When travelling outside Hong Kong, members of the public need to stay vigilant and avoid purchasing products containing CBD. Food and drinks, or even health supplements, skincare products (such as facial masks, massage oils), etc, may also contain CBD. No product containing CBD, regardless of its concentration, is allowed into Hong Kong.

The statistical figures of the CRDA for the first three quarters of 2024 are available on the website of the ND (www.nd.gov.hk/en/crda_main_charts_and_tables.html). The ND's website (www.nd.gov.hk) as well as its official accounts (narcotics.divisionhk) on Facebook and Instagram also contain detailed information about drugs, including frequently asked questions about "space oil", cocaine and cannabis for the public's reference. If members of the public encounter any drug

problems, they can send messages to 98 186 186 on instant messaging applications WhatsApp and WeChat, or call the 24-hour hotline 186 186 to seek information or assistance from professional social workers.