

LCQ1: Regulation of products containing cannabis

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (February 23):

Question:

It is learnt that cannabidiol (CBD) can be extracted from cannabis plants, and products containing CBD are increasingly common on the market. Such products include medicines, oils, food products, drinks and cosmetics. Quite a number of products containing CBD are claimed to have the effect of easing stress or relieving pain only, and are neither addictive nor hazardous to health. However, some medical experts have pointed out that a prolonged or excessive intake of CBD may possibly lead to poisoning of organs such as the liver and kidneys and, in severe cases, may even lead to failures of such organs. In addition, products containing CBD seized in recent years by the Hong Kong Police Force and the Customs and Excise Department have been found to contain tetrahydro-cannabinol (THC), which is a dangerous drug specified under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details of the products containing THC seized in law enforcement actions in the past five years, including the locations of sale as well as the types and quantities of the products;

(2) whether it will study as soon as possible the classification of CBD as a dangerous drug specified under Cap. 134, so as to strengthen the regulation of the products concerned; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider stepping up law enforcement as well as education and publicity efforts, so as to combat crimes involving the sale of products containing cannabis; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

Cannabis is a drug subject to strict control by the United Nations. In Hong Kong, cannabis, cannabis resin, tetrahydro-cannabinol (THC) and certain other cannabinoids are already controlled under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (DDO) (Cap. 134). Cannabidiol (CBD) is generally extracted from cannabis, and CBD products may contain THC which is psychoactive.

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan is as follows:

(1) Law enforcement agencies (LEAs) (including the Hong Kong Police Force and

the Customs and Excise Department) proactively launched operations at various locations to seize and test products claiming to contain CBD in view of the different types of CBD products imported and sold locally in recent years. Since 2019, nearly 120 such operations have been carried out at such locations as restaurants, shops (including large-scale chain stores), boundary control points, warehouses, etc. Products involved include food, health supplements, oral oil, e-cigarette oil or additives, skin care products, personal care products (e.g. toothpaste, bath balls), massage products, pet food, etc. These products were sent to the Government Laboratory for testing, and among products for which testing had been completed, more than 3 800 of them were found containing THC. LEAs will continue to seize and test CBD products based on risk assessments, relevant intelligence, complaints, proactive inspections, etc.

(2) CBD products may contain other cannabis compounds controlled under the DDO, such as THC. There are views that the Government should prohibit the sale of CBD products or adding CBD to food in order to protect public health. We have adopted "zero tolerance" towards drugs and we understand that it is a matter of public concern. Therefore, the Government plans to control CBD under the DDO, and will consult the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Security as well as the Action Committee Against Narcotics within this year. We also informed the LegCo Panel on Security meeting on February 8 this year about this legislative direction.

(3) To combat cannabis abuse and related crimes, the Government has stepped up the thematic publicity on "Cannabis is a drug", through conventional media (such as television (TV) and radio programmes) and social media (such as dissemination of short videos and infographics), as well as different types of activities, in order to help members of the public to understand the harms of cannabis and the serious consequences of committing drug trafficking crimes. For instance, in February this year, we launched a TV Announcement in the Public Interest which is based on the experience of a former cannabis abuser, so as to publicise the harms of cannabis abuse and encourage drug abusers to seek help early. In addition, we will continue to mobilise various sectors of the community and provide financial support through the Beat Drugs Fund to support worthwhile anti-drug projects. The public can also make enquiries about drug problems or seek help through the telephone hotline 186 186 or through WhatsApp/WeChat at 98 186 186.

(4) On law enforcement, trafficking in dangerous drugs, or illegally importing into or exporting from Hong Kong dangerous drugs, or obtaining, supplying or manufacturing dangerous drugs, are criminal offences and punishable by a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment. Illegal possession or consumption of dangerous drugs is also a criminal offence, punishable by a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for seven years. LEAs will enforce the law rigorously and continue to work with international and regional counterparts, including maintaining liaison and conducting intelligence exchanges and joint enforcement operations, to combat drug trafficking involving cannabis. In view of the situation of illicit sale of dangerous drugs through the Internet or social media, LEAs will also step up online patrols to combat drug trafficking.