

Statistical figures of drug abuse and drug situation in Hong Kong in first quarter of 2023

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) noted at its meeting today (June 15) the statistical figures of the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) and other drug-related figures for the first quarter of 2023. While the total number of reported drug abusers in the first quarter of 2023 was higher than that for the same period in 2022, the ACAN noted that the outbreak of the fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic during the first quarter of 2022 may probably have affected the relevant figures during that period. The ACAN will closely monitor the situation in the remaining quarters of 2023, and will at the same time continue to carry out its anti-drug work.

Figures from the CRDA revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first quarter of 2023 was 1 779, compared with 1 509 for the same period in 2022. In addition, the number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 was 205. Regarding drug types, data showed that the most common type of drugs abused in the first quarter of 2023 was heroin, followed by cocaine and then methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice"), while the most common type of drugs abused among young drug abusers aged under 21 was cocaine, followed by cannabis and then ketamine (commonly known as "K").

The ACAN noticed that, in the first quarter of 2023, cocaine continued to overtake "Ice" and became the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, which is same as the full-year situation in 2022. Among the reported young drug abusers aged under 21, it is a concern that over half of them (51 per cent) abused cocaine. Furthermore, when categorising arrests for drug offences by drug types, the number of persons arrested for offences related to cocaine was the highest.

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Donald Li, said, "Cocaine is a powerful central nervous system stimulant that easily causes addiction. It will severely suppress the breathing centres of the brain, causing delirium, irregular breathing, convulsions, unconsciousness and even death. Moreover, cocaine could cost its abusers their life savings and burden them with enormous debts, seriously affecting their lives and the ones of their friends and families. Some cocaine abusers may even take risks and get involved in drug trafficking activities as well as other crimes, ending up being brought to justice and ruining their prospects. Same as all other drugs, cocaine can cause profound harmful effects. No one should ever have a try."

To combat drug problems, the Government will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach comprising preventive education and publicity, drug treatment and rehabilitation, legislation and law enforcement, external co-operation as well as research. The Narcotics Division (ND) of the Security Bureau, in collaboration with relevant government departments and non-

governmental organisations, will step up promotion and education efforts to help members of the public understand clearly the harm of drugs, especially cocaine. As regards the challenges posed by emerging new drugs, the Government will continue to stay vigilant in closely monitoring drug trends in and outside Hong Kong, and will take appropriate follow-up actions to safeguard public health.

On law enforcement, according to the figures from the law enforcement agencies (LEAs), 841 persons were arrested for drug offences in the first quarter of 2023. Among them, 91 were under the age of 21. Among all the drug offence cases concluded in courts in the same period, the conviction rate was high and close to 90 per cent, while the conviction rate was over 90 per cent among the young offenders aged under 21 who were prosecuted for drug trafficking. As for the young offenders aged under 21 who were sentenced to imprisonment for drug trafficking, half of them were sentenced to over five years in prison, while the longest period of imprisonment was nearly 25 years.

The spokesperson for the ND said that LEAs will continue sparing no effort to combat drug crimes, and young people could also be sentenced to long-term imprisonment according to previous court cases. At the same time, LEAs will not tolerate offenders who involve youngsters in drug trafficking activities, and will continue to endeavor to tracking down drug syndicates exploiting youngsters, and invoke Section 56A of the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance to seek enhanced sentencing on such syndicates. Members of the public are reminded not to carry unknown items for others, let alone to participate in drug trafficking (e.g. providing addresses for receiving "drug parcels") out of greed or gambling on luck. These actions will bring about lifelong regrets. Offenders upon conviction are liable to a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of \$5 million.

As large-scale entertainment events and social gatherings are becoming more frequent, as well as summer holidays are approaching, the ND reminded members of the public to stay away from drugs at all times, be it during outbound travel or social gatherings. In addition, members of the public should pay close attention to product labels during online or in-store shopping, and should not buy products that may contain drugs, especially those with cannabis or cannabidiol (CBD) as an ingredient, to avoid breaching the law inadvertently. Examples of CBD products are already uploaded onto the website of the ND (nd.gov.hk/pdf/examples_CBD_products.pdf) for public reference.

The website of the ND (nd.gov.hk) contains information about drugs, including cocaine and cannabis, as well as details about CBD on a dedicated webpage. To seek information or assistance from social workers, members of the public can make use of instant messaging applications WhatsApp and WeChat by sending messages to 98 186 186, or call the 24-hour hotline 186 186. The figures of the CRDA for the first quarter of 2023 are also available on the website of the ND (nd.gov.hk/en/crda_main_charts_and_tables.html).