

Total number of reported drug abusers in first quarter 2020 declines but youth drug abuse remains a concern

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug situation in the first quarter of 2020 at its quarterly meeting today (June 11). While the total number of reported drug abusers declined compared to the same period in 2019, the cannabis abuse problem among young people has persisted.

Figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first quarter this year decreased as compared with same period last year. However, the figures might have been affected by the COVID-19 situation. For example, reporting agencies might have come into contact with fewer drug abusers due to the pandemic, and might have taken more time to submit data of drug abusers to the CRDA. The Narcotics Division (ND) and ACAN will closely monitor the number of reported drug abusers in the remaining quarters of 2020 to arrive at suitable analysis of the drug situation in Hong Kong.

According to the latest figures of the CRDA, the total number of reported drug abusers in the first quarter of 2020 decreased by 13 per cent (from 2,175 to 1,896) as compared to the same period last year. The number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 decreased by 15 per cent (from 162 to 138), with students accounting for 27 per cent of reported drug abusers of that age group, which was roughly equivalent to the proportion in the same period last year.

The number of reported cannabis abusers decreased by 13 per cent (from 182 to 159) compared to the same period in 2019. For reported drug abusers aged under 21, although the number of cannabis abusers decreased by 14 per cent (from 72 to 62) as compared to the same period last year, cannabis remained the most popular type of psychotropic substance abused. The situation warrants attention.

The number of newly reported drug abusers decreased by 29 per cent (from 460 to 326). Nearly half (49 per cent) of them were young adults aged between 21 and 35. The median history of drug abuse of newly reported abusers (i.e. the time for abusers to be reported to the CRDA by reporting agencies from their first drug abuse) was 5.6 years, compared with 5.5 years in the first quarter of 2019.

In the first quarter of 2020, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) decreased by 27 per cent (from 1,332 to 969) compared to the same period in 2019. The total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers increased by 5 per cent (from 1,074 to 1,128). Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 291) remained substantially

higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 47).

Heroin remained the most common type of drug abused among all reported drug abusers, with the number of reported abusers having increased by 5 per cent (from 1,074 to 1,126) compared to the same period last year. Methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice") continued to be the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 28 per cent (from 489 to 350).

The CRDA figures for the first quarter of 2020 are available on the website of the ND (www.nd.gov.hk/en/index.htm).

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Ben Cheung, said, "As revealed by the figures of the CRDA, cannabis abuse among young people calls for attention. Parents are encouraged to learn and understand the harm of cannabis together with their children. Anyone who encounters drug problems, or would like to know more about drugs and their hazards, can seek help through the ND's instant messaging service 98 186 186 or 24-hour hotline 186 186."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "With the summer holiday approaching, the ND and ACAN will step up anti-drug publicity. This will include the launch of new TV and radio Announcements in the Public Interest on the harm of cannabis, TV programmes, a new pamphlet and detailed information on cannabis, with a view to encouraging members of the public – in particular young people – to deepen their understanding on the harm of cannabis and resist the temptations of the drug. As for the perils of abusing other drugs such as "Ice" and cocaine, the ND will continue to carry out relevant preventive education and publicity."