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Panel on Security

Meeting on 17 March 2025

**Background brief on anti-drug education and publicity and
the prevention and control of “space oil drug” in Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration’s anti-drug education and publicity efforts, as well as the prevention and control of a new drug (commonly known as “space oil drug”) in Hong Kong, and gives an account of Members’ past discussions on related subjects in the Seventh Legislative Council (“LegCo”).

Background

2. Preventive education and publicity (“PE&P”) is part of the Administration’s multi-pronged anti-drug strategy. As the first line of defence in tackling the drug problem, a number of PE&P initiatives have been put in place on various fronts to enhance public awareness of drug abuse, drug harms and drug trafficking, as well as to encourage drug-abusers’ early help-seeking. These include promotion to the public through different channels, community involvement, targeted PE&P for students through schools and tertiary institutions, proactive engagement with young people, and counteracting misleading or false drug-taking information.

3. In 2024, the increasingly wide circulation among youngster of a new abused substance, “space oil”, has caused grave public concern. According to the Administration, “space oil” is usually inhaled through electronic cigarettes (“e-cigarettes”). Having no standard formula, “space oil” usually contains etomidate as one of its main active ingredients, as well as three analogues which share similar chemical structures and properties with etomidate, namely metomidate, propoxate, and isopropoxate. While the Central Registry of Drug

Abuse¹ had received only zero or single-digit number of reports on abuse of “space oil” from 2021 to 2023, a total of 300 abuse cases were recorded in 2024 as follows:

Age group	Aged under 21	Aged 21 or above
Number of reports	226	74

4. The **abuse of etomidate and the above three analogues** would lead to **dependence**, as well as **physical and mental harm**, say memory loss, seizure, unconsciousness, adrenal suppression or even death. Albeit the lack of relevant international drug control, etomidate and its three analogues were listed as **controlled drugs in the Mainland** in October 2023 and July 2024 respectively. In respect of local legislation, etomidate is subject to the control of the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations (Cap. 138A) as a Part I Schedule 1 and Schedule 3 poison (Prescription Drug) and the licensing requirement under the Import and Export Ordinance (Cap. 60). As a policy measure to step up the control on “space oil”, etomidate and its three analogues have been added to Part I of the First Schedule to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134) (“DDO”) as **dangerous drugs with effect from 14 February 2025**.²

Members’ views and concerns

Preventive education and publicity initiatives against drug abuse

5. Expressing concerns about the number of persons arrested for drug-related offences which remained at a few thousands each year and the prevalence of drug-taking behaviours and related misleading information in films, Members urged the Administration to step up its PE&P efforts to forestall drug abuse, say by making **greater use of technology and digital media** to reach out to the public to raise their anti-drug awareness, launching **television programmes** to disseminate anti-drug messages, as well as including in its PE&P initiatives **more direct and explicit messages** on drug harms and the dire criminal liabilities of drug-related offences.

¹ The Registry, established in 1972, is a voluntary reporting system compiling information of those drug abusers who have come into contact with and have been reported by the reporting agencies. It provides relevant drug abuse statistics for monitoring changes in the drug abuse trends and characteristics of drug abusers to facilitate the planning of anti-drug strategies and programmes in Hong Kong.

² Illicit trafficking or manufacturing of dangerous drugs is liable to a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of \$5 million (on conviction on indictment). Possession or consumption of dangerous drugs in contravention of DDO is subject to a maximum penalty of seven years’ imprisonment and a fine of \$1 million (on conviction on indictment).

6. The Administration advised that efforts had been and would continuously be made to leverage on technology and digital media in its PE&P initiatives. A case in point was the use of Wi-Fi technology for projecting anti-drug messages on mobile devices of party room users. Meanwhile, information on the harmful effects of drug abuse and the dire criminal liabilities of drug-related offences had been highlighted in its PE&P initiatives, such as the launch of a short video by the Hong Kong Police Force featuring a convicted person who received a sentence of 15-year imprisonment for trafficking in 2 grams of drug, as well as those by the Narcotics Division of the Security Bureau (“ND”) on the harmful effects of various types of drugs. The Administration also drew Members’ attention to the introduction of the mandatory requirement for the broadcast of anti-drug videos in class by schools participating in certain anti-drug programmes.

7. Members had all along been concerned about the drug abuse problem of the youngsters. They noted that the number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 had recorded a year-on-year decrease of 11% (from 744 to 659) in 2023, whereas the number of young persons aged under 21 who were arrested for drug offences in 2023 had decreased by 33% (from 483 to 323) as compared with 2022. Noting that there were 431 newly reported drug abusers under the age of 21 in 2023 and the main reason for young people aged under 21 to take drugs was identification with peers, Members urged the Administration to **strengthen its PE&P efforts targeted at youth at risk to protect them from drug harms and curb the youth drug abuse problem.**

8. The Administration advised that ND had joined hands with the Education Bureau (“EDB”) and non-governmental organizations in arranging for school personnel to undergo anti-drug training on identifying at-risk students, and EDB had drawn up guidelines for schools on the handling of drug-related incidents. That apart, ND had put in place a series of PE&P initiatives targeted at students, including (a) the Healthy School Programme with a Drug Testing Component (“HSP(DT)”) and the Beat Drugs With Sports Programme which promoted a drug-free school culture by enhancing students’ resolve to stay away from drugs through personal growth activities and voluntary school drug testing (for the former) and student-led sports-related activities with anti-drug themes (for the latter); (b) the development of teaching resources in collaboration with EDB on anti-drug education which formed a part of the Values Education Curriculum Framework (Pilot Version); and (c) the launch of interactive anti-drug drama targeted at upper primary students on drug harms, the skills of refusing drugs and the dire consequences of committing drug offences.

9. Members noted that with the support of the Beat Drugs Fund, ND had implemented HSP(DT) since the 2011-2012 school year. Expressing concern that only about half (i.e. 240-odd) of all secondary schools in Hong Kong had participated in HSP(DT) so far, Members enquired about the **challenges which**

ND had encountered in recruiting secondary schools to join HSP(DT). The Administration advised that while there might still be concerns among stakeholders over the potential labelling effect after joining HSP(DT) which had an element of voluntary school drug testing, some non-participating schools had already developed a healthy school policy with an anti-drug element (which might on occasion include drug tests). ND had stepped up its recruitment efforts for HSP(DT) and would continue to do so, say by launching proactive explanatory work for stakeholders (such as school sponsoring bodies, principals' associations and parents' associations) to appeal for their participation, as well as organizing sharing sessions by participating schools on their experiences.

Enforcement against “space oil”

10. Referring to the wide circulation of “space oil” among young people in the local community since the first half of 2024, Members were concerned about the enforcement actions taken by the law enforcement agencies (“LEAs”) against the substance, in particular the respective numbers of arrests made for illegal sale and possession of “space oil”³. They **urged LEAs to conduct decoy operations on a proactive basis** to curb the abuse of “space oil”. The Administration advised that arrests had been made for offences involving “space oil” containing etomidate since 2023. The breakdown by age group of cases in which the Government Laboratory had confirmed the presence of etomidate in the seized substance was tabulated below:

Year	Number of arrestees aged under 21		Number of arrestees aged 21 or above	
	Involving illegal sale of etomidate	Involving illegal possession of etomidate	Involving illegal sale of etomidate	Involving illegal possession of etomidate
2023	0	3	0	6
2024 (until August 2024)	1	13	2	53

11. Members enquired how **LEAs’ enforcement actions would be stepped up in tandem with the bringing of etomidate under control of DDO.** The Administration advised that the Hong Kong Police Force had started using Etomidate Rapid Test Kits since 18 January 2025, which allowed its frontline officers to conduct on-site rapid tests for etomidate for cases suspected of possessing etomidate. Meanwhile, LEAs would strengthen cyber patrols and

³ Before etomidate, the main ingredient of “space oil”, was listed as a dangerous drug under DDO with effect from 14 February 2025, it is already regulated as Part 1 poison under the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations and can only be prescribed by a doctor. Illegal supply or use of etomidate is liable to imprisonment upon conviction.

intelligence-based enforcement actions targeting “space oil drug” trafficking on the Internet and social media.

Specific preventive education and publicity efforts against “space oil drug”

12. Members suggested further stepping up **PE&P that prevent young people from abusing “space oil”**. The Administration advised that there had been on-going collaboration with related stakeholders in this regard. For instance, two seminars on “space oil drug” abuse were organized in August and October 2024 to enhance the vigilance against and responsiveness to “space oil” among the school sector and anti-drug community. ND had also put in place various measures to step up related PE&P. These included the inclusion of information on the harmful effects of “space oil” in its anti-drug educational talks and interactive drama for schools, the setting up of a new dedicated zone on “space oil” at the Hong Kong Jockey Club Drug InfoCentre in mid-September 2024, as well as the publishing of social media posts and the launching of an animated video on the harmful effects of “space oil”.

13. Separately, Members noted that by their appearance, “poisonous capsules” containing “space oil” or other regulated drugs or narcotics are no different from regular e-cigarettes capsules, so it was difficult to distinguish the ingredients by bare eye. They were concerned about **the illegal use of alternative smoking products (“ASPs”), including e-cigarettes, for abusing “space oil”** and that some young people might become addicted to “space oil” without realising it. According to the Administration, the Health Bureau would further strengthen the regulation of ASPs, including banning the possession of relevant products so as to, among others, curb the emergence of ASPs as an alternative drug abuse product.

Relevant papers

14. A list of relevant papers available on the LegCo website is in the [Appendix](#).

Council Business Divisions
Legislative Council Secretariat
13 March 2025

Appendix

List of relevant papers on anti-drug education and publicity and the prevention and control of “space oil drug” in Hong Kong

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Security	5 July 2022	Agenda item III: Drug situation in Hong Kong in 2021 and proposed amendments to the First Schedule to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134) and Schedule 2 to the Control of Chemicals Ordinance (Cap. 145) Minutes
	6 June 2023	Agenda item IV: Drug situation in Hong Kong and anti-drug efforts by the Administration (including proposed amendments to the First Schedule to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134)) Minutes
	4 June 2024	Agenda item IV: Drug situation in Hong Kong in 2023 and anti-drug efforts by the Government Minutes
	5 November 2024	Agenda item III: Briefing by the Secretary for Security on the Chief Executive’s 2024 Policy Address Minutes of policy briefing
	11 February 2025	Agenda item I: Law and order situation of Hong Kong in 2024 Minutes of special meeting

Council meeting	Paper
31 January 2024	Question 4 : Committing drug-related offences by young people
23 October 2024	Question 7 : Combating the vaping of “space oil”
12 February 2025	Question 12 : Tackling smoking problems