Ref: NCR 2/1/8 S/F(30)

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BRIEF

Dangerous Drugs Ordinance
(Chapter 134)

DANGEROUS DRUGS ORDINANCE (AMENDMENT OF FIRST SCHEDULE) (NO. 2) ORDER 2025

INTRODUCTION

At the meeting of the Executive Council on 8 July 2025, the Council ADVISED and the Chief Executive ORDERED that the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Amendment of First Schedule) (No. 2) Order 2025, at the **Annex**, should be made under section 50(1) of the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134) ("DDO"), to –

Annex

(a) impose control on all analogues of etomidate so as to step up our fight against "space oil drug"; and

(b) bring six substances under control as dangerous drugs based on the latest international control regime, namely (i) N-Pyrrolidino protonitazene; (ii) N-Pyrrolidino metonitazene; (iii) N-Piperidinyl etonitazene; (iv) N-Desethyl isotonitazene; (v) hexahydro derivatives of cannabinol and their 3-alkyl homologues; and (vi) carisoprodol.

JUSTIFICATIONS

2. The growing predominance of psychotropic substance abuse and the continuous emergence of new drugs and precursor chemicals pose challenges to legislative control and law enforcement globally. The Government has been vigilant in closely monitoring drug trends in and outside Hong Kong and take timely action to bring new drugs and precursor chemicals under legislative control. As a regular exercise, the Government has from time to time proposed amendments to DDO and the Control of Chemicals Ordinance (Cap. 145) ("CCO") to include new dangerous drugs and precursor chemicals under statutory control, having regard to a host of relevant factors, including international control requirements, the uses and harmful effects of the substances, severity of abuse in the local and overseas contexts, advice of the Action Committee Against Narcotics ("ACAN") and relevant authorities, etc. This is to ensure that law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong could respond effectively to the drug scene.

"Space Oil Drug" - A More Stringent Control based on Scientific Evidence

3. "Space oil drug" which contains etomidate or its analogues as active ingredients began to circulate widely among high risk groups in 2024. According to the Central Registry of Drug Abuse maintained by the Narcotics Division of the Security Bureau ("the ND"), from 2023 to 31 May, 2025, there were 493 recorded "space oil drug" abusers, of whom 356 persons, or about 70 per cent, were young people aged below 21. To curb "space oil drug" abuse, the Government has raced against time and expeditiously launched targeted measures on multiple fronts, which include legislation, strengthened law enforcement, and preventive education and publicity to reduce drug demands.

4. On the front of legislation, the Government received support from the Legislative Council ("LegCo") and quickly listed the main active ingredient of "space oil drug", i.e. etomidate and its three analogues (namely isopropoxate, metomidate, and propoxate), under the DDO on 14 February 2025. The legislative amendment has greatly enhanced the power of LEAs in dealing with the "space oil drug" problem. Since the listing of etomidate as a dangerous drug on 14 February, 2025, LEAs have successfully stopped the supply of more than 220 000 drug-filled cartridges by the end of May 2025 with a total of 405 persons arrested. The listing of active chemical ingredients of "space oil drug" under the DDO has also greatly enhanced the deterrent effect against the drug and serves as a reminder to the public about its risk.

5. Recent scientific analysis has shown that certain analogues of etomidate that are currently not listed as dangerous drugs under the law may potentially be abused and could be exploited by criminals to circumvent legal sanctions. According to current research, those analogues have no legitimate medical or industrial uses thus far. Their abuse would lead to dependence and would bring harmful health effects to human. While there is no evidence that the unlisted analogues are prevalent at present, to nip potential crime in the bud, the Government is taking a pre-emptive step and proposes the listing of all analogues of etomidate in Part I of the First Schedule to the DDO by way of introducing a generic definition of the etomidate analogues which will cover not only the three analogues (namely, isopropoxate, metomidate, and propoxate) that were added in February 2025.

6. Once the generic definition of etomidate analogues is introduced to the DDO, the law enforcement agencies will be empowered to combat the possession and trafficking of etomidate analogues immediately as and when they appear. In practical terms, the general public would be banned from using etomidate analogues, including consumption through electronic cigarettes.

Six Substances under International Control

7. In addition to etomidate analogues, the Government has been keeping a close watch on the emergence of new synthetic and precursor chemicals which may pose challenges to legislative control and law enforcement globally. At the 68th Session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs held in March 2025, Member States adopted the recommendation by the World Health Organization ("WHO") to place six dangerous substances under international control[1]. Their adverse effects as elaborated in the 47th report of the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence are set out as follows –

(a) **N-Pyrrolidino protonitazene** is more potent than morphine and fentanyl. Its adverse effects, documented in clinical presentations, are also consistent with opioid effects, including dizziness, bradycardia, hypotension and respiratory depression;

(b) **N-Pyrrolidino metonitazene** is more potent than morphine and shows potent opioid effects and abuse potential, similar to those of morphine and fentanyl. Multiple deaths have been reported in which N-Pyrrolidino metonitazene was analytically confirmed, including one death in which no other opioids were involved;

(c) **N-Piperidinyl etonitazene** is a synthetic opioid and has been identified in falsified pharmaceutical opioid tablets. In humans, adverse effects include respiratory depression and reduced consciousness;

(d) **N-Desethyl isotonitazene** is a synthetic opioid and has been identified in falsified pharmaceuticals, in the form of round blue tablets. Its adverse effects, including analgesia, euphoria, miosis, muscle rigidity, unconsciousness, sedation, respiratory depression, coma and hypercapnia, are consistent with opioid toxicity;

(e) **Hexahydrocannabinol ("HHC")** is a semi-synthetic cannabinoid and has been described as a colourless viscous oil or resin. In humans, sleepiness, euphoria, anxiety, agitation, psychosis, tremors and disorientation were reported, in addition to respiratory, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal effects. It produces dependence similar to that produced by other cannabinoids; and

(f) **Carisoprodol** is available as a pharmaceutical product in tablet form. It has effects similar to those of other central nervous system depressants. In humans in the context of prolonged use, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms and craving have been documented.

1 Namely, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971. The Conventions stipulate that state parties shall take legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary to give effect to and carry out the provisions of the Conventions.

Increasing numbers of cases of carisoprodol dependence have been recorded in clinical settings.

8. The five substances listed at paragraphs 7(a) to (e) have no known medical use nor therapeutic application. There is also no registered pharmaceutical product containing any of them in Hong Kong. As regards trade declarations, there is no record of import and export of these substances in Hong Kong over the past five years. Regarding HHC, our analysis shows that its derivatives sharing similar chemical structures (such as hexahydrocannabihexol (HHCH)) display similar properties to HHC. Those derivatives are also proposed to be banned together to avoid ambiguity and prevent circumvention.

9. Carisoprodol listed at paragraph 7(f) is a centrally acting skeletal muscle relaxant. There is one registered pharmaceutical product containing carisoprodol in Hong Kong but it is not a first line drug here. As regards trade declarations, there were 16 import records of carisoprodol over the past ten years.

10. HHC [2] and carisoprodol are currently controlled under the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations (Cap. 138 sub. leg. A) ("Cap. 138A") as Part 1, Schedule 1 and Schedule 3 poisons. Any person who commits an offence under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138) would, unless otherwise expressly provided, be subject to a maximum penalty of fine at level 6 (i.e. $100,000) and imprisonment for two years. In addition, any import and export of carisoprodol as a pharmaceutical product must be covered by a licence issued under the Import and Export Ordinance (Cap. 60). Listing of the two substances under the DDO will enhance the deterrent effect against illicit trafficking activity.

THE PROPOSAL

11. In order to enable law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong to respond effectively to the latest drug abuse developments as set out in paragraphs 3 – 10 above, we propose to amend Part I of the First Schedule to the DDO to impose control on the following substances, namely (a) N-Pyrrolidino protonitazene; (b) N-Pyrrolidino metonitazene; (c) N-Piperidinyl etonitazene; (d) N-Desethyl isotonitazene; (e) hexahydro derivatives of cannabinol and their 3-alkyl homologues; (f) carisoprodol; and (g) analogues of etomidate by introducing a generic definition covering any compound structurally derived from etomidate. Since all analogues of etomidate will be covered upon the amendment, including but not limited to isopropoxate, metomidate, and propoxate, it is no longer necessary to list the aforementioned three analogues separately in Part I of the First Schedule to the DDO.

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2 While HHC does not have any medical use, it is regulated as part of "cannabinol and its tetrahydro or hexahydro derivatives; their 3-alkyl homologues; any ester or ether of any substance falling within this item" under Cap. 138A.

LEGISLATIVE TIMETABLE

12. The Order would be considered by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") by negative vetting. The detailed legislative timetable is as follows-

Gazettal of the Order	18 July 2025
Tabling at the LegCo for negative vetting	23 July 2025
Commencement date of the DDO Order (i.e. takes effect immediately upon gazettal)	18 July 2025

13. In view of the recent abuse situation as mentioned at paragraph 3 above and its impact especially on youngsters, the LegCo Panel on Security supported fully the Government's pre-emptive step to amend Part I of First Schedule to DDO at the meeting on 3 June 2025. To enable early commencement of the control, the DDO amendment order is to take effect immediately upon gazettal.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

14. The proposal is in conformity with the Basic Law, including the provisions concerning human rights. It has no implication on Mainland relations and hence, no related public relations measure is considered necessary. It will not affect the current binding effect of the DDO. It has no economic, civil service, environmental or gender implications. The proposal is also in line with the sustainability principle of pursuing policies which protect the health of the people of Hong Kong. From the family perspective, apart from inflicting health damage to the abuser, drug abuse is also often found to have a profound impact on an abuser's family. The proposal would help prevent potential family problems and tension aroused by drug abusers. The additional workload and financial implications arising from the implementation of the proposal are expected to be minimal and any additional requirements will be absorbed by the relevant bureaux and departments with existing resources.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

15. We consulted ACAN on the proposed control, and it supported the legislative proposal. We also consulted the LegCo Panel on Security on the introduction of generic definition of etomidate analogues and the six substances under international control. Members of the Panel supported fully the proposal at the meeting on 3 June 2025. Regarding the control of etomidate analogues, they urged for early legislative amendment in view of the evolving situation. We have expedited the process and will arrange for the Order to commence on the day on which it is published in the Gazette, with the tabling at the LegCo for negative vetting before the end of the current LegCo session, as set out in paragraph 12 above.

16. The relevant trades, including holders of licences under the DDO, have been consulted on the legislative proposal with no objection received. In view of the medical use of etomidate and carisoprodol, the Narcotics Division ("ND") of the Security Bureau also consulted relevant stakeholders.

17. The ND has so far received four written submissions from the medical sector concerning analogues of etomidate and carisoprodol. The Hospital Authority advised that the enhanced regulatory control on analogues of etomidate and carisoprodol would reduce the potential risk of abuse for those substances and therefore is welcomed. The Hong Kong Dental Association supported the Government's proactive measures to safeguard public health by implementing further regulatory control while maintaining accessibility to them for legitimate responsible medical use. Prince Philip Dental Hospital advised that analogues of etomidate and carisoprodol are not on the drug list currently maintained by their Hospital. The Private Hospitals Association also expressed support to the proposed regulatory control of carisoprodol and analogues of etomidate.

PUBLICITY

18. The Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Amendment of First Schedule) (No. 2) Order 2025 will be published in the Gazette on 18 July 2025. A press release will be issued on 16 July 2025. A spokesperson will be available for answering media enquiries.

BACKGROUND

19. Under DDO, substances included in Part I of the First Schedule are dangerous drugs and are subject to the control of a licensing scheme administered by the Department of Health ("DH"). The manufacture, import, export and supply of these substances will require respective licences issued by DH. Trafficking and manufacturing of the substances in contravention of DDO will be subject to a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of $5 million. Possession and consumption of the substances in contravention of DDO will be subject to a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment and a fine of $1 million.

ENQUIRIES

20. Any enquiries concerning this brief can be directed to the following officer –

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Tel. No.: 2867 5220

Narcotics Division
Security Bureau
July 2025

Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Amendment of First Schedule) (No. 2) Order 2025

(Made by the Chief Executive under section 50(1) of the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134) after consultation with the Executive Council)

1. Commencement

This Order comes into operation on 18 July 2025.

2. Dangerous Drugs Ordinance amended

The Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134) is amended as set out in section 3.

3. First Schedule amended

(1) First Schedule, Part I, paragraph 1(a), item "Cannabinol and its tetrahydro derivatives; their 3-alkyl homologues (大麻酚及其四氫衍生物；其 3-烷基同系物)"—

Repeal

"derivatives; their 3-alkyl homologues (大麻酚及其四氫衍生物；其"

Substitute

"or hexahydro derivatives; their 3-alkyl homologues (大麻酚及其四氫或六氫衍生物；它們的".

(2) First Schedule, Part I, paragraph 1(a), before item "Cathine (去甲麻黃碱)"—

Add

"Carisoprodol (卡立普多)".

(3) First Schedule, Part I, paragraph 1(a)—

(a) item "Isopropoxate (異丙帕酯)";

(b) item "Metomidate (美托咪酯)";

(c) item "Propoxate (丙帕酯)"—

Repeal the items.

(4) First Schedule, Part I, paragraph 1(a), after item "1-Cyclohexyl-4-(1,2-diphenylethyl)piperazine (1-環己基-4-(1,2-二苯基乙基)哌嗪)"—

Add

"N-Desethyl isotonitazene (N-去乙基異丙托尼秦)".

(5) First Schedule, English text, Part I, paragraph 1(a), item "4-Phenylpiperidine-4-carboxylic acid ethyl ester (4-苯基哌啶-4-羧酸乙酯)"—

Repeal the semicolon.

(6) First Schedule, Part I, paragraph 1(a), after item "4-Phenylpiperidine-4-carboxylic acid ethyl ester (4-苯基哌啶-4-羧酸乙酯)"—

Add

"N-Piperidinyl etonitazene (N-哌啶基依托尼秦)

N-Pyrrolidino metonitazene (N-吡咯烷基美托尼秦)

N-Pyrrolidino protonitazene (N-吡咯烷基丙托尼秦);".

(7) First Schedule, Part I, paragraph 1(p)—

Repeal the full stop

Substitute a semicolon.

(8) First Schedule, Part I, after paragraph 1(p)—

Add

"(q) any compound (not being a compound for the time being specified in subparagraph (a)) structurally derived from etomidate by modification in any of the following ways—.

(i) by replacement of the ethoxycarbonyl by any other alkoxycarbonyl or any haloalkoxycarbonyl group;

(ii) by substitution in the phenyl ring to any extent with alkyl, alkoxy, aryloxy, halogeno or haloalkyl substituents.".

Chief Executive

11TH JULY 2025

Explanatory Note

This Order amends Part I of the First Schedule to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134) to bring 6 substances and certain derivatives of etomidate into the regulatory regime under the Ordinance.