

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Singapore's Drug Laws and Enforcement Efforts

1. Some countries have legalised cannabis for medical reasons. Why is Singapore not doing the same?

Singapore is supportive of measures to ensure the availability and safe access to controlled medicines for medical and scientific uses. However, there is no critical need to legalise cannabis for medical uses. There are other available treatment options, with comparable efficacy that do not need cannabis for medical conditions (e.g. chemotherapy-induced nausea, spasticity due to multiple sclerosis).

Even if it has proven medical benefits, there is no need for a blanket legalisation of cannabis to improve its accessibility for medical purposes. Like other medicines, cannabis should be subjected to the protocols of clinical research and approval process for use.

As it is, current policies for controlled drugs, such as morphine, have to be prescribed for legitimate medical uses. While cannabinoid pharmaceuticals are not approved for sale in Singapore, requests to import cannabis for medical purposes can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

There is a need to have strict protocols in place to prevent diversion to other illicit use or abuse. This is especially important since cannabis remains a harmful substance, and the evidence of cannabis safety remains debatable.

While there are some reported therapeutic potential of cannabis, there are **no conclusive studies** done to verify the effects of cannabis oil or hemp oil. There are some lab researches showing certain cannabinoids may have useful therapeutic applications, but more conclusive studies need to be done. In contrast, there is well-founded research that establishes several short-term and long-term adverse effects associated with cannabis use, including impairments to one's respiratory and cognitive functions.

2. What if I consume drugs overseas?

Under Singapore's Misuse of Drugs Act, it is an offence for any Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident to consume drug in Singapore and overseas. Any Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident found to have abused drugs overseas will be treated as if he/she had abused drugs within Singapore.

Consumption of a controlled drug is an offence and a person may face imprisonment of a minimum of 1 year and up to 10 years, or a fine not exceeding S\$20,000 or both.

3. How is CNB tackling the problem of online drug peddling? What are the measures taken to stop people from buying drugs online illegally?

Online drug peddling and the sale of drug-related items online is not a new phenomenon. Some people think that buying drugs online lowers the chances of getting caught or allows people to fake an identity, but this is a misperception.

CNB works closely with other agencies such as the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) as well as major postal and courier companies to monitor and detect deliveries. If suspicious parcels are detected, CNB will conduct the necessary investigations and carry out the necessary enforcement action.

4. Does glue sniffing offence fall under the purview of CNB?

Yes. It falls under Intoxication Substances Act which is under CNB's purview. Intoxicating substances refer to substances that contain toluene, such as glue and paint thinner. Inhaling, supplying or offering to supply such substances for purpose of intoxication are offences under the law.

Unknowningly being Involved with Drugs

5. What if there is a raid at the entertainment outlet and I was implicated? Will my urine be tested positive if I visit a club and I am surrounded by people smoking cannabis? Will my urine be tested positive if I unknowingly consume food laced with cannabis? Will I get arrested?

CNB would like to caution against going to places where cannabis is smoked openly. If you suspect that someone is smoking cannabis around you, you are advised to leave the place immediately.

Do note that smoking cannabis recreationally in public in Thailand is still illegal, and offenders can be subjected to three months' imprisonment and a fine under Thailand's laws. Hence, Singaporeans/PRs travelling to Thailand should be well aware of the laws in Thailand, and be cognisant that consuming drugs overseas is an offence under the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA). Under the MDA, any Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident found to have consumed controlled drugs outside Singapore will be liable for drug consumption offence as if the offence had been committed in Singapore.

CNB also advises the public to always verify and be aware of the food they have bought/ordered, and not to accept food from strangers or unknown sources.

Should an investigation be initiated, all cases will be thoroughly investigated, and appropriate actions will be taken, based on the facts of the case.

6. How do I prove that my drink is spiked? Or that I am not a drug abuser, when I am tested positive but there is no drugs found on me?

Due process of the investigation will be carried out.

When attending functions, parties, or clubs, you are strongly encouraged to:

1. Be aware of your surroundings.
2. Do not leave your drinks unattended.

7. What if I am caught and they found drugs on me?

Due process of investigation will be done. A urine/hair test will be administered, statements will be taken, and investigations will be duly carried out as well.

8. What happens if I unknowingly bring in drugs into Singapore?

ICA and CNB perform checks at Singapore's checkpoints and airports and will take action against those found to have consumed drugs overseas or have drugs in their possession.

Word of advice when you are overseas:

1. Do watch your belongings.
2. Do not trust strangers or be too helpful to hold on to their belongings, or items when you are approached.
3. Be aware of your surroundings.

9. I am heading to countries where drugs (including cannabis) are legalised. What precautions can my family and I take, against accidentally consuming cannabis-infused products?

In some other countries, drugs such as cannabis are added as ingredients to edibles like candies and cakes, and irresponsibly marketed as harmless consumables. Some products may be marketed as 'health' products, and contain hemp, hemp seed oil, Cannabidiol (CBD) oil, cannabis oil, or claimed to be Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)-free. Please note that any products containing hemp derivatives as an ingredient or derived from the Cannabis Sativa plant or its seeds can contain controlled drugs such as THC, despite the product labels indicating otherwise.

CNB would like to advise the public to always verify and be aware of the food and products they have bought/ordered, and not to accept food from strangers or unknown sources.

Singapore adopts a strict policy of zero tolerance towards abuse of controlled drugs. The consumption, possession, trafficking, import or export of any controlled drugs without authorisation (including cannabis, cannabis products or cannabis edibles) even in trace amounts, is an offence under the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA).

CNB will not hesitate to take necessary enforcement action against anyone who disregards Singapore's drug laws.

Abusing Drugs and Other Substances

10. How long do drugs stay in our body?

It varies according to many factors such as the drug type, the dose, one's metabolism rate, which differs from person to person.

Through hair analysis, CNB can detect drugs in the body even months after use. Through urine test, CNB can detect drugs up to a week after use.

11. Is it easy to get out of the drug addiction cycle?

It is never easy to get away from drugs and break away from addiction. Some people may claim that they are not addicted and will not get addicted, but addiction is not something that you can control easily. Drugs play on your mind and behavior. You may not even know that you are addicted until much later when it's too late.

There is no such thing as “try only one time”. Once is usually enough to get someone hooked; in unlucky cases, the person may even die from the very first try.

There is also no such thing as “soft drugs”. Soft drugs are terms that drug pushers use to mislead people into thinking that the drugs are “less dangerous” to lure them into trying.

Drug abuse is dangerous and causes lasting damage regardless of “its type”. Upon trying drugs once, there is a higher tendency to start experimenting with other drugs, leading one to be caught in the addiction cycle.

12. What is the connection between smoking, vaping and drug abuse?

All three are addictive and harmful behaviours with legal consequences if you commit an offence.

Majority of drug abusers arrested are smokers.

Smoking is an offence for anyone under 21 years old in Singapore and vaping is illegal regardless of age. Just don't do any of it! If you need help to quit smoking/vaping, check out the resources and support provided by the Health Promotion Board (HPB)!

13. Is it true that cannabis is not as addictive or harmful as other controlled drugs, and is not used as a gateway drug?

According to a literature review by IMH¹, cannabis is addictive.

Among those who used cannabis, about 1 in 10 will develop dependence. This increases to 1 in 2 among those who use cannabis daily.

The World Drug Report 2020 reported that in the US, data from states that have legalised cannabis for recreational use showed an increase in public health and public safety indicators (cannabis-related emergency room visits, hospitalisations, traffic accidents and related deaths).

The evidence from human studies to support cannabis as a gateway drug is mixed. However, animal studies have shown that the use of cannabis and other addictive substances, such as heroin, increases the likelihood of using other illegal drugs.

Studies have also shown that cannabis today (e.g. cannabis concentrates, cannabis resin, dabs, waxes) is much more potent in Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) (the psychoactive substance) than it was in the past. The risk of dependence, addiction and other negative health consequences increases.

If you would like to know more information on cannabis, you may download the kNOw Cannabis booklet from CNB's [website](#).

¹ A Literature Review on Medical Cannabis: Conducted by a team of psychiatrists and researchers from the Institute of Mental Health, Singapore, 2016

14. Is taking cough syrup considered an offence?

Taking cough syrup is not an offence. It is the misuse of the cough syrup which is an offence. The abuse of cough syrup falls under the Poisons Act which is under the purview of the Ministry of Health (MOH). Members of the public are encouraged to report any illegal activity involving illegal cough syrup to the Health Sciences Authority (HSA).

15. Is Cold Spray/Laughing Gas/Butane harmful?

Cold Spray, laughing gas and butane all have legitimate uses, but if you misuse them such as inhaling the fumes, it becomes harmful and dangerous.

If you know of anyone who is addicted to such substances, advise him/her to approach the National Addiction Management Services (NAMS) to seek help.

Being Vigilant against Drugs

16. How do I resist and refuse drugs?

Here are 7 tips to stay drug-free:

1. Avoid situations where you might be influenced or pressured to try drugs
2. Be bold – say “NO” when you are offered drugs
3. Make a joke and excuse yourself from the situation
4. If all else fails, walking away is the best way to protect yourself
5. Adopt healthy ways to cope with stress – exercising, listening to music, meditation, etc.
6. Pick up a new skill! – this is the time for you to learn a new language or sign up for that diving course
7. Spend your time meaningfully – involve yourself with community work, volunteer and create positive networks

17. There is so much information on the internet/media about drugs. How do I verify such information to ensure they are not fake news?

When you read about information online, you could follow the **SURE²** steps.

First, check the **S**ource.

- Is the author or commenter an expert in the field? Does he have any links to any organisations or vested interest to present the information this way? If he claims to be a user of the drug, would you trust his opinion to be objective given the influence of drugs on him?

Second, **U**nderstand the context.

- Is the information a fact or merely just an opinion? Does he have any evidence to prove? What is the purpose of the website? Is it a website meant to provide objective information or just a forum where simply anyone can comment?

² The National Library Board (NLB) first launched the S.U.R.E programme in 2013 to promote the importance of information searching and discernment to the general public.

Third, Research.

- Have you checked the evidence and references provided using multiple sources? Did he use only information which serves to his advantage of encouraging drug use?

Fourth, Evaluate.

- Consider if the arguments presented make sense to you. Consider why people are promoting drug use and why Singapore has a zero-tolerance stance on drugs. For countries that legalized drugs such as cannabis, are they doing for the good of their people, for money or because of political pressure?
- Evaluate in Singapore's context. Given our way of life right now, do we want to risk letting a drug-taking culture take root?

18. How can I play a part to prevent drug abuse?

Everyone can play a part in keeping our society drug-free. You can support the anti-drug cause by maintaining a strong and firm stand against drug abuse.

Adults who exert an influence over the young, especially parents, teachers and youth leaders, are in the best position to inculcate in them an aversion to illicit drugs. CNB has developed resources to equip such persons of influence to engage our youths. They can be accessed from CNB's [website](#).

Educational institutions can support anti-drug advocacy by encouraging students to take part in preventive drug education (PDE) activities, as well as to integrate PDE or intervention strategies into the school curriculum.

Youths can sign up to be an Anti-Drug Advocate (ADA) where they will gain understanding on Singapore's drug control policies and information about the harms of drugs. They will also participate in experiential learning as well as be equipped with relevant skills through attending programmes like assertiveness skills modules. With such knowledge and skills, they will be well-equipped to support their peers to adopt a drug-free lifestyle.

Volunteers are welcome to participate in community-led anti-drug campaigns like the Dadah Itu Haram (DIH) and Bothaiporulai Ethirthu Nirpom (BEN). Launched in 2017, the DIH campaign is a ground-up community-nuanced initiative which supports the anti-drug efforts within the Malay-Muslim community. The BEN campaign was launched in 2019 and seeks to spread the anti-drug message to the Indian community.

Death Penalty for Drug Trafficking

19. Why must Singapore impose the death penalty? Isn't the death penalty too harsh as a punitive punishment?

Singapore's overall strategy to tackle the drug problem comprises preventive drug education, tough laws and effective enforcement, and rehabilitation. These different components work hand in hand to help keep our drug situation under control by reducing the supply and the demand for drugs.

Singapore's small size, open economy, and interconnectedness as a regional transport hub makes us vulnerable to the influx of drugs from the region. Apart from tackling drug demand through preventive drug education such as today's session and through rehabilitation of drug abusers such as by supervising them and helping them live drug-free lives, we take firm measures against drug traffickers who want to make profits out of the misery of others such as the drug addicts and their families and dependents, so that drug traffickers and syndicates are deterred from bringing illicit drugs into or through Singapore.

20. What concrete evidence is there to prove that the death penalty is an effective deterrent against drug trafficking?

A 2018 survey by MHA 2018 showed that convicted drug traffickers who were aware of the death penalty trafficked below the threshold that attracted the death penalty. Likewise, in a study surveying people from places in the region where most arrested drug traffickers in Singapore are from, 83% believed that the death penalty makes people not want to traffic substantial amounts of drugs into Singapore.

80% of Singapore residents also believed that the death penalty had been able to deter serious crimes like intentional murder and drug trafficking.

Source: [mha.gov.sg/docs/hta_libraries/publications/ht-journale-jan-2020-\(special-edition\).pdf](https://mha.gov.sg/docs/hta_libraries/publications/ht-journale-jan-2020-(special-edition).pdf)

21. What are your personal views about the death penalty?

As Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, Mr K. Shanmugam said “*We prefer not to have to impose the death penalty on anyone, but we have to continue to do what is best for us as a matter of policy... The impact of drugs on innocent children, babies, is rarely ever discussed. Drug traffickers profit from destroying these children and their families. Where should our sympathies be placed?*”