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OPENING REMARKS BY MR ONG YE KUNG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON...

Speeches

OPENING REMARKS BY MR ONG YE KUNG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO TACKLE VAPES

28 August 2025

1. Let me first start by explaining the situation we are facing. With vapes, the landscape for consumption of harmful substance has changed in very different way now.
2. It used to be the case that unhealthy habits like cigarette smoking and substance abuse – they are two separate behaviours by two separate sets of people.
3. Now, vapes have become a delivery device and then the two behaviours become mixed up. And vapes become a gateway for very serious substance abuse. So we are facing a very different situation now.
4. So there are many people, especially the young, they picked up vaping thinking that it is alright and it's not as harmful as cigarettes, and then out of curiosity, out of coercion, or out of just ignorance, they wandered into substance abuse, which is what we are seeing now for etomidate. That is the situation we are facing – something new.
5. This change in landscape means therefore we have to adapt our current approach towards substance abuse.
6. It will have to become a whole of Government effort. It is no longer just the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). And actually, it has never been just about MHA but now it is even more so.
7. So the Ministry of Health (MOH), we enforce the ban on vapes and contraband ↻
illegal use, as well as when it starts to be used for abusive substance and harmful



8. Then MHA leans in to support enforcement against the abuse of the more harmful substance, like etomidate, through vapes, with strict penalties.
9. And other agencies come in to support enforcement in their respective settings, whether it's in military camps, whether it's in schools, institutes of higher learning, and other public spaces.
10. So we announced on 20 July this year we will list etomidate as a Class C drug in the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA). So actually at that point in time, the decision was already made, and this will now come into effect on 1 September 2025. You may ask why there is this period of about one and a half months. This period served three purposes:
 11. First, it gives abusers an opportunity to give up their vapes, which we try to promote. We put bins all around the island. We do not expect to collect many, but it is a signal to them to give up now.
 12. Second, to get agencies to work out the new operating model under this WOG approach. There are many protocols that we need to string together and stitch together, and we spent the time doing that.
 13. And finally, we started reviewing our legislation at MOH, which is currently not set up for this model of operation. We need a fit-for-purpose law, to adapt to this new landscape that I talked about. We have developed a framework now. It is reflected in the enforcement model that we are going to present today. And we plan to enact this new legislation in the first quarter of 2026.
14. In the meantime, we will use existing legislation. One is the Tobacco (Control of Advertisements and Sale) Act (TCASA). Reading the name alone, you know it is not fit for purpose, but we are using TCASA. We are using the Poisons Act. We are, of course, using the MDA, to give force to the enforcement framework which we will be explaining shortly. It is not ideal, but it will work, pending the new legislation in early 2026.
15. I will just highlight two major features of this enforcement model.
16. Number one, tougher penalties for importers, sellers and traffickers because of the listing in the MDA. So drug-like penalties will take effect from that date.
17. Traffickers and sellers of etomidate vapes will now face up to 10 years' jail and five strokes of the cane, up from two years' jail and a fine under the Poisons Act.
18. For importers, it is more serious – up to 20 years' jail and 15 strokes of the cane.
19. Number two major feature of this model is the rapid escalation of penalties for abusers of etomidate. Rapid escalation – I will explain why.
20. Like other drug abusers, abusers of etomidate can also be subject to mandatory supervision, detention and jail under the MDA once we list it.
21. That said, we need to consider the change in landscape that I explained



first announced the listing of etomidate in the MDA, the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) just tested random samples of pods – about 100 of them – that we have seized from abusers. So we seize from members of public and abusers, randomly pick them up and test them for etomidate, and then discovered one-third of them are etomidate-laced. And we announced it.

23. After our announcement on 20 July, and the awareness built up and subsequent publicity was very useful, we did the same exercise again. Only last week, we also extracted about 100 of them to test them randomly. The percentage is now 12%, fallen from one-third.

24. So this gives us reason to believe that the more stringent posture, that itself, has caused a fall in the prevalence of etomidate, as more people are aware of its harm and the more severe consequences that are coming their way.

25. And I think this has a lot to do with the younger profile of the etomidate abusers. So amongst vapers today, one-third are under-18 and more than half are under-30. For etomidate abusers, the profile is even more stark – about 80% are under 30.

26. So etomidate abusers, being largely young and probably ignorant, we think are different from hardcore drug abusers, and they may be more open to giving up.

27. So when an abuser is first caught, other than a fine, MOH will come in to require them to attend a rehabilitation programme. This is in lieu of tougher penalties under the law. So in lieu of prosecution, they are required to attend the rehabilitation programme. This is to give the abuser a chance to turn over a new leaf and put the etomidate behind him or her for good. The abuser can still have a good meaningful life ahead of him or her.

28. But if they decide to default or re-offend, penalties will escalate very rapidly.

29. Let me now explain how this works.

30. So first-timer offenders for the abuse of etomidate, they will be required to attend a three-month rehabilitation programme at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and selected Social Services Agencies (SSAs) like Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) or WeCare.

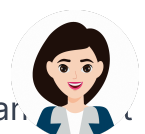
31. Offenders are required to report weekly under the programme.

32. During the programme, they will undergo individual counselling, group support and necessary medical tests. For severe cases, the programme may be extended from three months to six months.

33. But if they refuse to attend or default on the attendance, they may be charged under the Poisons Act and face imprisonment of up to two years.

34. If they re-offend, they will be arrested under the MDA – where they can undergo a long supervision regime, or end up in the Drug Rehabilitation Centre, under Singapore Prisons Service.

35. The rehabilitation requirement I just described represents a second chance that the Government is giving the offenders. They can also give themselves the second



...me we call QuitVape.

36. This is run by our community partners – WeCare, SANA, Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities and Fei Yue Community Services.
37. So, come forward, if you are vaper, or worse, etomidate vaper. Come forward, contact them, tell them you want to quit vaping or etomidate vaping, and they will help you deal with your addiction.
38. They are not required to report cases to MOH or the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB). There will not be an offence record. So that is a chance you can give yourself.
39. We will also use this framework to enhance our enforcement against general vaping, not etomidate vaping.
40. It is very bad for health. The nicotine content of vaping pods is very high, which is why Singapore bans it. Our tests show that one pod contains as much nicotine as four packs of cigarettes, and a young person can just smoke on it the whole day. Unlike cigarettes, there is no end. You just keep smoking until the pod ends. And by then, you have taken in four cigarette packs worth of nicotine.
41. We will raise the fines for vape consumption, from \$300 and \$500 for the young and adults respectively, to \$500 and \$700.
42. For recalcitrant vapers, if caught, we will also impose a rehabilitation requirement on them.
43. This will be run by the Health Promotion Board. It involves weekly reporting for one month. And based on our experience, this will help the majority kick the habit. And for the subsequent two months, it will be monthly reporting, just to make sure that the habit does not return.
44. If they default, they will be charged and subject to a fine of \$2,000 under TCASA.
45. Let me end by thanking everyone for this concerted effort against vapes.
46. The public has been very, very supportive, taking a clear stand against something that is harmful and wrong.
47. The media, and I will especially recognise The Straits Times, has mounted a very effective campaign that raised the awareness of the harm of vapes, especially etomidate vapes.
48. Many social media influencers have created very useful content. They speak in the language of the young to warn them against the harms of vapes and etomidate vapes.
49. Many ministries and agencies came together in a very short time to collectively work on this. So, I thank all the agencies and their officers for doing this.
50. And I want to especially thank our MOH colleagues for stepping up, par... HSA and their Chief Executive Officer, Raymond Chua, who is here.



famous during the COVID-19 pandemic because they were the ones testing all the vaccines and therapeutics, and now they are again thrust into the limelight.

52. Actually, their main role in peacetime is to approve drugs and medical devices, do lab tests, and encourage blood donation.

53. The Poisons Act is administered by them. It was enacted mainly to regulate the industry in the handling of controlled substance, to make sure companies have licences and adhere to the terms and conditions. It is not to police substance abuse.

54. But now their expertise in that testing and analysis is used for etomidate detection and enforcement.

55. And they are deeply involved in street enforcement, including heroic acts like jumping onto cars. I want to especially thank our HSA enforcement officers for their bravery, for their dedication, but please be careful. Many agencies are also supporting your work.

56. Like COVID, MOH found ourselves thrust into unfamiliar territory. But through these episodes, we build different capabilities to better serve the public, and the health of the public. Our public officers do this because of their sense of public service and I thank each and every one of them sincerely.

57. Let me invite Minister Desmond Lee, to say a few words, thank you.

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