

Hong Kong to ban CBD, label it a 'dangerous drug'

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An employee adds drops of water-soluble CBD, or cannabidiol, an essential component of medical marijuana, into a coffee glass at the Found Cafe in Hong Kong on Sept. 13, 2020. Hong Kong will ban cannabidiol or CBD from the beginning of next month, authorities announced Friday, Jan. 27, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Vincent Yu, File

Hong Kong will ban CBD starting Wednesday, categorizing it as a "dangerous drug" and mandating harsh penalties for its smuggling, production and possession, customs authorities announced Friday.

Supporters say CBD can treat a range of ailments including anxiety and that, unlike its more famous cousin THC—which is already illegal in Hong Kong—CBD doesn't get users high. Cannabidiol, derived from the cannabis plant, was previously legal in Hong Kong, where bars and shops sold products containing it.

But Hong Kong authorities decided last year to prohibit the marijuana-derived substance—a change that will soon go into effect. Residents were given three months from Oct. 27 to dispose of their CBD products in special boxes set up around the city.

"Starting from February 1, cannabidiol, aka CBD, will be regarded as a dangerous [drug](#) and will be supervised and managed by the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance," customs intelligence officer Au-Yeung Ka-lun said at a news briefing.

"As of then, transporting CBD for sale, including import and export, as well as producing, possessing and consuming CBD, will be illegal," Au-Yeung said.

Penalties include up to life in prison and Hong Kong \$5 million (\$638,000) in fines for importing, exporting or producing CBD. Possession of the substance can result in a sentence of up to seven years and Hong Kong \$1 million (\$128,000) in fines.

In announcing the ban last year, the Hong Kong government cited the difficulty of isolating pure CBD from cannabis, the possibility of contamination with THC during the production process and the relative ease by which CBD can be converted to THC.

"We will tackle all kinds of dangerous drugs from all angles and all ends, and the intelligence-led enforcement action is our major goal," Chan Kai-ho, a divisional commander with the department's Airport Command, told reporters Friday.

Despite the harsh penalties mandated, Chan said authorities would handle enforcement on a case-by-case basis and "seek legal advice from our Department of Justice to determine what the further actions will be."

Hong Kong maintains several categories of "dangerous drugs," which include "hard drugs" such as heroin and cocaine, as well as marijuana.



Coffee, biscuits, green tea and chocolate mooncake that contain cannabidiol, or CBD, a substance from the cannabis plant, are displayed at the Found Cafe in Hong Kong on Sept. 13, 2020. Hong Kong will ban cannabidiol or CBD from the

beginning of next month, authorities announced Friday, Jan. 27, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Vincent Yu, File

Hong Kong's first CBD cafe opened in 2020 and the ban will force scores of businesses to remove CBD-infused gummies, drinks and other products, or shut down altogether.

The ban is in keeping with a zero-tolerance policy toward drugs in Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous southern Chinese business hub, as well as on mainland China, where CBD was banned in 2022.

Chinese authorities have waged battles against heroin and methamphetamines, particularly in the southwest bordering on the drug-producing Golden Triangle region spanning parts of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos.

Criminal penalties for both sale and usage are also enforced for marijuana. In one of the most high-profile cases, Jaycee Chan, the son of Hong Kong action star Jackie Chan, served a six month sentence in 2014-2015 for allowing people to consume marijuana in his Beijing apartment amid a crackdown on illegal narcotics in the Chinese capital.

At the same time, China has been a main source of the precursor chemicals used to manufacture the dangerous drug fentanyl, a trade often facilitated through social media.

A wealthy Asian financial center with a thriving commercial port and major international airport, Hong Kong is a key point of entry to China as well as a market for some drugs, especially cocaine. Police have recently seized hundreds of kilograms (pounds) of the drug worth tens of millions of dollars, some of it hidden in a shipment of chicken feet from

Brazil.

Most Asian nations maintain strict drug laws and enforce harsh penalties for violators, including the death penalty, with the exception of Thailand, which made it legal to cultivate and possess marijuana last year.

Debate over CBD policy continues in many countries and regions.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said Thursday there's not enough evidence about CBD to confirm that it's safe for consumption in foods or as a dietary supplement. It called on Congress to create new rules for the massive and growing market.

Marijuana-derived products have become increasingly popular in lotions, tinctures and foods, while their legal status has been murky in the U.S., where several states have legalized or decriminalized substances that remain illegal federally.

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