

Known adverse effects and health risks of Etomidate

Abusing etomidate can lead to noticeable acute side effects, including nausea and vomiting, dizziness and fainting, unsteady gait, involuntary muscle twitching and tremors, as well as acute mental confusion, emotional instability, or disorganized behaviour. Due to impaired mental clarity and difficulty controlling the body, the risk of falls or other accidents significantly increases. The unseen impacts are even more hazardous. Etomidate interferes with adrenal hormone secretion, causing low blood potassium, unstable blood pressure, and severe adrenal failure, which can lead to death. Female users may experience issues such as menstrual disturbance, facial hair growth, and hair loss. According to the Hong Kong Poison Control Centre², an analysis of 45 cases seeking treatment due to etomidate abuse, identified the three main symptoms as mental confusion (36%), limb tremors (22%), and unsteady gait (16%). Of these cases, 9% were severe enough to require intensive care unit admission, and 7% resulted in death.

References

1. Chen, Y., Liu, J., Song, T., Zou, X., Li, L., Nie, Q., & Zhang, P. (2024). A case of fatal poisoning caused by etomidate: Evidence from pathological and toxicological analyses. *Forensic Science, Medicine and Pathology*, 1-5.
2. Wong, Irene & Chan, CK & Tse, ML. (2025). Spread of 'space oil drug' (etomidate) abuse in Hong Kong and consequent emergency department presentations. *Hong Kong Medical Journal*. 10.12809/hkmj2412728.

What to do if you or someone you know is struggling with Etomidate abuse ?

- Call "186 186" or send messages via WhatsApp/ WeChat at "98 186 186" to get in touch with social workers for further assistance
- Reach out to the Counselling Centre for Psychotropic Substance Abusers (CCPSA) for professional counselling and support.
- Consider seeking help from non-governmental organizations that offer rehabilitation programmes and voluntary residential drug treatment
- If you experience any physical discomfort or mental issues, seek professional medical attention immediately.



For more information

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Publisher: Institute of Mental Health, Castle Peak Hospital

Castle Peak Hospital (1st edition)

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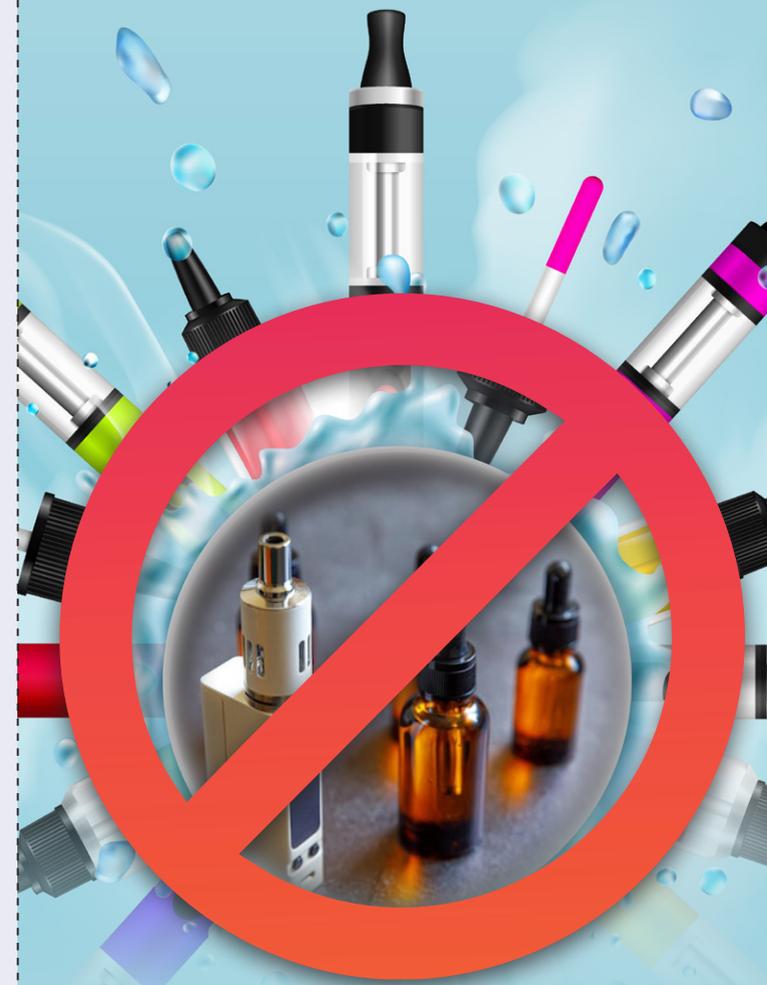
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Funded by Patient Empowerment Programme,
New Territories West Cluster
新界西醫院聯網 病人啟力基金贊助



What is ?? Etomidate?



What is Etomidate?

Etomidate is a new psychoactive substance. It is often consumed by mixing it with e-cigarette liquids or vape capsules. The primary ingredient is etomidate, but it can be laced with other harmful substances or illicit drugs, such as nicotine, cannabis, methamphetamine, or ketamine.

Is it illegal to consume Etomidate ?

Starting from February 2025, etomidate has been classified as a controlled drug under the Dangerous Drug Ordinance (DDO) (Cap. 134). Illegal possession or smoking, ingesting and injecting of etomidate is punishable by a maximum fine of HKD 1 million and 7 years' imprisonment. Sales, trafficking or manufacturing of such substance carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of HKD 5 million.

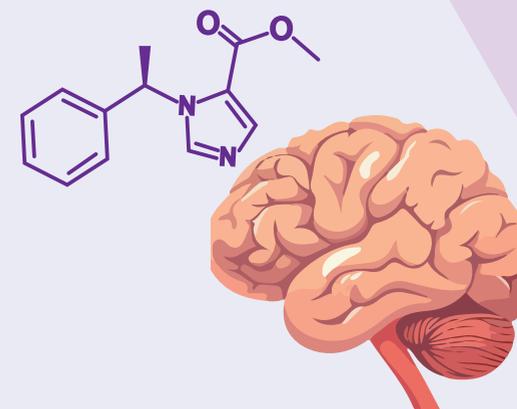


How is Etomidate detected?

At present, etomidate can be detected through rapid urine testing or more precise laboratory analyses. Since January 2025, law enforcement has been using rapid testing tools to assess whether e-cigarettes contain etomidate, and sending samples to government laboratories for further confirmation.

What is the effect of Etomidate?

Etomidate is a non-barbiturate sedative. It suppresses central nervous system, impairs sensory perceptions and causes temporarily loss of consciousness. Due to its rapid onset and short duration, etomidate is commonly used as a sedative or an anesthetic for minor surgeries and medical procedures.



What are the health risks associated with using Etomidate?

Research on the effects of etomidate abuse is still limited. Little is known about the full extent of the long-term health consequences. The practice of using it with other illicit substances makes its effects even more unpredictable and dangerous. A case report regarding death from etomidate abuse has been published in the medical literature.¹