

Drugs in schools – policy

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Read this document with the Drug education guidelines and Management of drug related incidents in schools guidelines.

1. Introduction

All Northern Territory (NT) Government schools must plan for and implement appropriate responses to drug related incidents, with an emphasis on prevention through curriculum-based drug education. Schools are required to deliver drug education as part of a standard curriculum program using the principles outlined in the Drug education guidelines and in accordance with the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education.

The Department of Education (department) will assist schools to implement sequential, age and contextually relevant drug education programs and policies that aim to reduce the adverse health, social and economic effects of drug use; recognising that schools are well placed to provide young people with the skills and knowledge to make sound choices and decisions.

The department does not tolerate the possession or use of drugs in schools and applies a harm minimisation approach to the management of suspected drug-related incidents. The possession, use and distribution of illicit and licit drugs in government schools is regarded as a serious breach of discipline and may constitute grounds for suspension under section 91 of the *Education Act 2015*.

Schools must be prepared for situations where students may be suspected of possession, supply or use of drugs and have procedures for managing the incident in accordance with relevant legislation and the department's policy and guidelines.

For clear direction in developing and implementing policies and procedures for responding to such situations in a timely and effective manner, schools should refer to the Management of drug related incidents in schools guidelines.

2. Business need

Drug use by students is a concern for the department, parents, educators and the community because of the potential for harm. Harmful drug use is associated with an increased risk of poor educational, social and health outcomes.

Schools can play an important role in the prevention of drug use by providing supportive environments that strengthen student resilience and protective behaviours, a curriculum that engages students and is relevant to their needs, and by encouraging students to stay at school.

It is important for schools to have strategies in place to manage drug-related incidents, and for parents and students to receive strong, consistent messages about drugs that encourage a proactive approach to minimise the risks associated with drugs and drug use.

Students need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to keep them safe in a society where drug use occurs and, in some circumstances, is condoned or encouraged. Engaging students in drug education assists them to make safe and healthy choices, identify risks and develop strategies to prepare them for challenging situations.

This policy will ensure a clear and consistent approach to the management of drug related incidents and the delivery of drug education in schools.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- the possession, supply and use of licit, such as alcohol and tobacco or e-cigarettes, and illicit, such as cannabis, drugs on school premises by students in NT Government schools
- inappropriate use of prescribed or over the counter medications
- inappropriate use of inhalants or volatile substances
- the strategies schools should undertake to control, regulate and respond to drug use, possession and distribution or supply in the school context and prevent or minimise student uptake of harmful drug use through curriculum-based drug education.

This policy does not apply to:

- medical or pharmaceutical drugs sanctioned in writing for students with notified medical conditions of a chronic – constantly recurring, or severe – critical or dangerous, nature. This is addressed in the administration of medications to students with notified medical conditions policy
- the use and possession of medication for the treatment of short-term illnesses and infections with antibiotics, or drugs commonly used for pain relief such as paracetamol. The administration of these medications requires written parental consent and is the responsibility of the first aid officer in the school. Refer to the department’s administration of medications to students with notified medical conditions policy
- the suspension, expulsion and detention of students as a result of drug-related incidents whilst in school. Schools should develop their own drug policy that includes consequences and roles and responsibilities tailored to the school’s context and in accordance with the Management of drug-related Incidents in schools guidelines. For more information regarding suspensions, expulsion and detention please refer to the suite of policy documents Managing student behaviour: detention, suspension and expulsion
- the use and consumption of alcohol or tobacco by department staff on school premises. Refer to the Alcohol consumption on department premises and Smoke free premises policies.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1. Principals

Principals are responsible for:

- ensuring that the school’s policy reflects the department’s policy and aligns with relevant legislation
- ensuring that all students and parents are aware of the policy and the consequences of possession, supply or use of drugs at school
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with the policy and procedures for managing drug related incidents
- establishing procedures for management of the situations where school staff have reported suspected drug related behaviours
- ensuring the school delivers a health education program that includes sequential and contextually relevant drug education.

4.2. Teachers

Teachers are responsible for:

- the delivery of drug education programs that addresses the needs of the students.

4.3. School counsellors

School counsellors, where applicable, are responsible for:

- supporting students who are at risk of harm related to the misuse of drugs
- working with the school to develop support plans for ‘at risk’ students
- where appropriate, initiating referrals to outside agencies.

4.4. School staff

All school staff are responsible for:

- demonstrating positive role modelling to students and the school community
- informing the principal in circumstances where they reasonably suspect that a student may be involved in drug related behaviours
- reporting suspected abuse or neglect, that may be related to student drug use, via the appropriate channels.

4.5. School based police officers

School based police officers are responsible for:

- operating in accordance with NT Police requirements and in collaboration with the department. Refer to Police in NT Government schools on the department’s website¹
- conducting interviews on school premises in exceptional circumstances only.

5. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the terms drug and drug use refer to all illicit and licit substances and suspected substance use, possession or supply.

Term	Definition
Drug	For the purpose of this policy, drugs include alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs and any other substance that alters brain function, resulting in changes in mood, perception, consciousness, cognition and behaviour. In some cases, drugs can also include over-the-counter and prescribed medications, such as pharmaceuticals, that can induce a drug-like state.
Drug-related incident	Situations where students are suspected of being under the influence of a drug, in possession of a drug, drug-use implement or substance suspected

¹ <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/police-in-nt-government-schools>

	of being illicit or unsanctioned or are presenting something as an illegal substance.
Electronic cigarettes – e-cigarettes, vapes, electronic nicotine delivery systems, ENDS, e-shisha, e-cigars, e-pipes, e-Hookas, hookah-pens, vape-pipes and e-cigs	Devices designed to be used in a way that replicates or produces an experience similar to the use of a tobacco product. The electronic devices deliver vapourised liquids to the lungs when breathed in. The <i>Tobacco Control Act 2002</i> applies to e-cigarettes as if they were tobacco products.
Illicit drug	A substance that the use, possession, cultivation or trafficking of is prohibited or illegal by law. Illicit drug use occurs when drugs are used in an illegal manner. This can include using a drug for an improper purpose or using a product or substance that is not intended to be a drug in a way which produces a drug-like state.
Licit drug	Drugs that are able to be purchased legally such as alcohol, tobacco or e-cigarettes and caffeine. This can also include medication used to treat illness, over-the-counter drugs used as directed, and prescription medicines used by the intended person for the prescribed usage. When these drugs are used in a manner that is against the law such as alcohol purchased by or supplied to someone who is underage, they become unsanctioned. Students purchasing or supplying licit substances illegally such as alcohol can be issued with a fine by the police.
Harm minimisation	Involves a range of approaches to prevent and reduce drug-related harm and can include abstinence from drug use, prevention, early intervention, specialist treatment, supply control and safer drug use.
Parent	Signifies a child’s father, mother or any other person who has parental responsibility for the child, including a person who is regarded as a parent of the child under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander customary law or tradition.
Volatile substances	Also known as inhalants or solvents and can include volatile solvents, such as petrol, aerosols, gases, glues and nitrites. These substances give off vapours and fumes at room temperature and contain psychoactive properties that can be potentially intoxicating when inhaled. Volatile substances carry significant risk and have the potential to cause cardiac sensitisation which can result in cardiac arrest or heart failure. Where a student is suspected of being under the influence of a volatile substance it is important that they are treated carefully and avoid sudden shock or over-exertion, for example physical activity such as running.
School Based Police Officer	A police officer designated to primary, middle and senior schools within their area of responsibility with particular focus on crime prevention and enhancing relationships between police and the community through positive interaction with youth.

6. Related legislation, policy and documents

6.1. Legislation and strategies

- *Education Act 2015* – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/LIQUOR-ACT-2019>
- *Liquor Act 2019* – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/LIQUOR-ACT-2019>
- *Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2012* – https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Search/~/.link.aspx?id=5A88F7688B9E4844B602AC78C064CEBC&_z=z
- *Misuse of Drugs Act 1990* – <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/national-drug-strategy>
- *National Drug Strategy 2017 - 2026 (Cth)* – <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/national-drug-strategy>
- *Tobacco Control Act 2002* – https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Search/~/.link.aspx?id=63E7EACE082543E4BD930D9B63C3CA17&_z=z
- *Youth Justice Act 2005* – https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Search/~/.link.aspx?id=0A377F4AE8B24A7CB6117D80D499D1AB&_z=z

6.2. Department of Education documents

- *Administration of medications to students with notified medical conditions policy* – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/medications>
- *Alcohol consumption on department premises policy suite* – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/school-operations/alcohol-consumption-on-department-premises>
- *Managing student behaviour: detention, suspension and expulsion policy suite* – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/school-operations/alcohol-consumption-on-department-premises>
- *Police in NT Government schools* – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/police-in-nt-government-schools>
- *Smoke free premises* – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/school-operations>

Acronyms	Full form
NT	Northern Territory

Document title	Drugs in schools – policy
Contact details	Inclusion and Engagement Services, Student Wellbeing and Inclusion Programs and Services, swipolicy.doe@education.nt.gov.au
Approved by	Executive Director Inclusion and Engagement Services
Date approved	28 February 2023
TRM number	50:DBOX22:2270

Version	Date	Author	Changes made
1	20 September 2017	Student Wellbeing and Inclusion	FILE2017/1038 EDOC 2017/59233
2	28 February 2023	Student Wellbeing and Inclusion Programs and Services	Administrative amendments to align roles and responsibilities to the structural alignment in effect from 1 July 2022, including NTG template and minor formatting and addition of electronic cigarettes definition