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## Youngsters also adding 'horse pills' for extra kick, says anti-drug agency

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**KOTA BARU:** Drinking a cocktail of ketum and cough syrup followed by a carbonated drink has become a trend among youngsters, as they can openly consume the intoxicating mix in public without arousing suspicion.

National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK) Kelantan director Rohayu Ahmad said many parents may not be aware that their children were consuming intoxicating drinks right before their eyes.

"This is because the ketum cock-

tail can be passed off as sugar cane juice, and it is normal for youngsters to guzzle carbonated drinks," she said.

Screening exercises in schools in the state also showed an increasing number of students testing positive for the horse steroid pill.

"Sucking a 'horse pill' after drinking the ketum cocktail gives an added kick.

"So far this year, 285 secondary school students in Kelantan were tested positive for 'horse pill', compared with 192 cases recorded for the whole of last year," she said.

Rohayu called on parents and

guardians to take note when their children drink green coloured drinks together with carbonated drinks, as the number of students testing positive for 'horse pills' had drastically increased this year.

"From 2014 to 2016, we saw decreasing numbers of students testing positive for 'horse pill' - from 272 to 246 to 192 cases.

"But this year, we recorded a drastic increase to 285 cases so far," she said.

She said there were existing test kits to clinically ascertain contents of prohibited materials such as 'horse pills', cannabis and synthetic

drug compounds, but none for ketum.

"We can test them positive for drugs, but not for ketum.

"We hope researchers will come up with a test kit for ketum, which contains the active ingredient mitragynine," she said.

Mitragynine has psychoactive properties, and is regarded as an opium substitute.

Apart from carrying out screening activities in secondary schools, Rohayu said they also hold campaigns to raise awareness on the dangers of drugs.

"The 'horse pills' adversely affect

mental health.

"Those taking ketum may feel fit at first. But in the long run, it can adversely affect digestion and cause stomach aches.

"Those hooked to it may eventually suffer from lost of appetite. Their cheeks may also appear sunken," she said.

Rohayu said ketum juice was sold at between RM5 to RM10, depending on the size of plastic bag.

"And cough syrup is sold at RM3 per packet. Packets of ketum and cough syrup are tied together. The buyers make the cocktail by mixing both before drinking," she said.