

HSA ALERT: THREE PRODUCTS FOUND WITH BANNED OR POTENT INGREDIENTS; THREE CONSUMERS SUFFERED ADVERSE EFFECTS

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is alerting members of the public not to purchase or use “88 Total White Underarm Cream”, “Sausando Cellulite Pills” and “Pelangsing Double Strong”. Three consumers experienced adverse effects, of whom two were hospitalised, after using “88 Total White Underarm Cream” and “Sausando Cellulite Pills”. HSA’s tests revealed that these illegal products contained banned or potent ingredients, including sibutramine and a high level of mercury.

Product name	Potent or banned ingredients	Source
“88 Total White Underarm Cream”	Mercury (toxic heavy metal) Betamethasone (potent steroid) Salicylic Acid (anti-acne and exfoliating agent)	Local retail shop at Lucky Plaza, local e-commerce platforms
“Sausando Cellulite Pills” “消脂丸 ダイエット マル”	Sibutramine (banned medicinal substance) Phenolphthalein (laxative) Frusemide (diuretic)	Local e-commerce platforms
“Pelangsing Double Strong”	Sibutramine (banned medicinal substance) N-desmethylsibutramine (a chemical similar to sibutramine) Diclofenac (painkiller)	Local e-commerce platforms

Please refer to **Annex A** for photos of the products and **Annex B** for more information on the potent ingredients.

2 “88 Total White Underarm Cream” was sold in a retail shop in Lucky Plaza and local e-commerce platforms, Shopee, Lazada and Carousell. “Sausando Cellulite Pills” and “Pelangsing Double Strong” were sold on Shopee and Lazada. All stocks of “88 Total White Underarm Cream” have been seized by HSA from the retail shop in Lucky Plaza and investigations are ongoing. HSA has also worked with the platform administrators to remove the affected listings and will take enforcement actions against online sellers.

“88 Total White Underarm Cream” led to severe skin reaction requiring hospitalisation

3 A woman in her 30s was hospitalised after using “88 Total White Underarm Cream” on her underarms for a month. She developed a severe rash affecting most parts of her body, as well as liver impairment with raised liver enzymes and jaundice. She was diagnosed with allergic contact dermatitis and drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms (DRESS) due to mercury exposure. DRESS syndrome is a severe hypersensitivity reaction characterised by skin rash, blood abnormalities and multi-organ involvement (e.g injury to the liver and/or kidney) which can be life-threatening. The woman had purchased the cream from a local retail shop in Lucky Plaza. The product was touted to provide whitening effect and smooth skin, and reduce body odour. HSA’s analysis revealed that it contained a high level of mercury and two other potent medicinal ingredients, betamethasone and salicylic acid.

4 Mercury is a toxic heavy metal and is prohibited for use in cosmetic products. Mercury may cause rashes, skin irritation and blotchiness, and can be absorbed through the skin to cause numbness, dizziness and headaches. Long-term exposure to high levels of mercury can cause serious health consequences. Betamethasone is a potent steroid which should only be used under medical supervision as it can cause serious adverse effects if used inappropriately. Salicylic acid is used to treat common skin conditions such as acne, psoriasis and dandruff, and could lead to dry, irritated skin and rashes, if used in high amounts.

“Sausando Cellulite Pills” and “Pelangsing Double Strong” found to contain banned substance, sibutramine

5 A man in his 50s was hospitalised after he experienced seizures (fits), hyponatraemia (low level of sodium in blood) and vomiting. He had been taking “Sausando Cellulite Pills” for five months. Another female consumer experienced thirst, insomnia, and heart palpitations after taking this same product. “Sausando Cellulite Pills” was marketed for weight loss, with claims that it could cause one to “lose weight fast in 7 days” and was a “natural health food”. Contrary to the latter claim, HSA’s analysis detected potent medicinal ingredients, sibutramine, frusemide and phenolphthalein.

6 HSA was alerted to the online sale of “Pelangsing Double Strong” by a member of the public. The product was sold as a slimming supplement “to lose weight and to maintain ideal body weight”. HSA tested the product and found that it contained sibutramine, n-desmethysibutamine (a chemical similar to sibutramine) and diclofenac.

7 Sibutramine is a prescription only weight loss medicine banned in Singapore since 2010 due to an increased risk of heart attack and stroke. Other serious health consequences reported with its use include heart problems and central nervous system disorders (e.g. psychosis and hallucinations). Seizures have also been reported with sibutramine.

Advisory to consumers

8 Consumers are advised to:

- See a doctor as soon as possible if you are using “88 Total White Underarm Cream” as it contains a high level of mercury and a potent steroid, which can cause serious harm to your health. Sudden stopping of products containing steroids without medical supervision may worsen underlying skin conditions e.g., eczema, and result in other serious withdrawal symptoms such as fatigue, confusion and low blood pressure.

- Stop taking “Sausando Cellulite Pills” and “Pelangsing Double Strong” immediately and consult a doctor if you feel unwell or are concerned about your health. There is no quick and easy way to lose weight. Weight control should be achieved through a combination of balanced diet and appropriate exercise. If you need help managing your weight, please consult your doctor or dietitian.
- Be wary of products that make exaggerated claims such as “lose weight fast in 7 days” while claiming to be “natural”. They may contain potent ingredients that can seriously harm your health.
- Exercise caution when buying products from unfamiliar sources or online as you cannot be certain where and how these products were made and whether they have been adulterated with harmful ingredients. Adulterated products are often manufactured under poor conditions with no quality control, and different batches of the same product may contain variable amounts of ingredients and/or different types of adulterants.
- Only buy from reputable pharmacies or retailers’ websites or those with an established retail presence in Singapore.

Advisory to sellers and suppliers

9 All sellers and suppliers must stop selling these products immediately. HSA will not hesitate to take stern enforcement actions against anyone who sells and supplies products found to be adulterated with banned substances, potent ingredients or toxic heavy metals beyond the allowable limits. Sellers and suppliers are liable to prosecution and if convicted, may be imprisoned for up to 2 years and/or fined up to \$50,000.

10 Members of the public who have any information on the sale and supply of these illegal products may contact HSA’s Enforcement Branch at Tel: 6866-3485 during office hours (Monday to Friday) or email: hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg.

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
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About the Health Sciences Authority (HSA)

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) applies medical, pharmaceutical and scientific expertise through its three professional groups, Health Products Regulation, Blood Services and Applied Sciences, to protect and advance national health and safety. HSA is a multidisciplinary authority. It serves as the national regulator for health products, ensuring they are wisely regulated to meet standards of safety, quality and efficacy. As the national blood service, it is responsible for providing a safe and adequate blood supply. It also applies specialised scientific, forensic, investigative and analytical capabilities in serving the administration of justice. For more details, visit <http://www.hsa.gov.sg/>.

For more updates on public health and safety matters, follow us at www.twitter.com/HSAsg.

About HSA's Health Products Regulation Group

The Health Products Regulation Group (HPRG) of HSA ensures that medicines, innovative therapeutics, medical devices and health-related products are wisely regulated and meet appropriate safety, quality and efficacy standards. It contributes to the development of biomedical sciences in Singapore by administering a robust, scientific and responsive regulatory framework.

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Photos of the products tested by HSA

“88 Total White Underarm Cream”



“Sausando Cellulite Pills”





“Pelangsing Double Strong”



POSSIBLE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF POTENT INGREDIENTS FOUND IN THE PRODUCTS

Betamethasone

Betamethasone is a potent steroid that is usually prescribed for inflammatory conditions and should only be used under medical supervision. Adverse effects associated with the topical use of steroids include hypersensitivity reactions and thinning of the skin. They may also be absorbed into the body and can cause Cushing's syndrome (characterised by a round face or "moon face" and upper body obesity with thin limbs) and high blood pressure, when applied to large areas of the skin or used over a prolonged period.

Diclofenac

Diclofenac is a potent painkiller that may potentially cause serious gastric bleeding, as well as cardiovascular events such as heart attacks and stroke when used for a prolonged period. It should be used under close medical supervision, especially in patients with underlying heart conditions.

Frusemide

Frusemide is a diuretic (medicine used to eliminate water and salt from the body) and is a prescription only medicine that should be used under medical supervision. The side effects associated with its use include loss of appetite and low blood pressure. When taken in excess, the 'water-eliminating' effect of frusemide can cause the depletion of sodium, chloride, body water and other minerals in the body.

Mercury

Mercury is a toxic substance and is prohibited for use as an ingredient in cosmetic products. Regular application of creams containing mercury could lead to rash, skin discolouration and blotching. Chronic exposure to very high levels of mercury in cosmetics may also cause toxic effects to the kidneys, digestive and nervous system, as it can be absorbed through the skin. This could lead to organ damage.

Phenolphthalein

Phenolphthalein was used as a laxative in the past but has not been registered in Singapore since 2011. Phenolphthalein may cause kidney disorders and has been found in animal studies to be associated with cancer. It may also cause breathing difficulties, rashes and abdominal cramps. It is an obsolete pharmaceutical compound that has been superseded by newer laxatives.

Salicylic acid

Salicylic acid is a medication that can be used for dermatologic conditions. Rare but serious hypersensitivity reactions may occur with the use of topical dosage forms of salicylic acid.

Sibutramine/ N-desmethylsibutramine

Sibutramine, previously a prescription only weight loss medicine used in the treatment of obesity, has been disallowed for sale in Singapore since 2010 due to increased risk of heart attacks and strokes. The use of sibutramine has been associated with serious side effects, including high blood pressure, irregular heartbeats, hallucinations, and mood swings. N-desmethylsibutramine is structurally similar to sibutramine and may have similar side effects.