



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE**

5 May 2009

HSA ADVISES CONSUMERS TO BE CAUTIOUS WHEN PURCHASING HEALTH PRODUCTS CLAIMING TO PREVENT OR TREAT INFLUENZA A (H1N1-2009)

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) would like to advise consumers to exercise caution when purchasing health products claiming to prevent or treat Influenza A (H1N1-2009). These products could be offered at retail outlets, via unsolicited spam emails or from the Internet.

2 In view of the current Influenza A (H1N1-2009) situation and a globalised market, the public can expect to see more products being promoted and offered for sale for the detection, prevention and treatment of Influenza A (H1N1-2009). Unscrupulous individuals and companies may capitalise on the Influenza A (H1N1-2009) outbreak for commercial gain. Consumers should be wary of products with such claims and which may be marketed as health supplements, medicinal products, medical devices or vaccines.

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS

3 Consumers are encouraged to be informed and updated on the Influenza A (H1N1-2009) situation by visiting the Ministry of Health website (<http://www.moh.gov.sg/>). If they are unwell or have questions regarding the disease and its treatment, they should seek advice from their doctors or pharmacists.

4 Consumers are also advised to adopt the safe and responsible practices presented below, when considering the purchase of health products with Influenza A (H1N1-2009) claims.

[A] Know your products

- **Tamiflu® and Relenza® are Prescription-Only-Medicines:** Currently, the two antiviral drugs that have been recommended by the World Health Organisation and health authorities worldwide for the treatment of Influenza A (H1N1-2009) are oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®). These drugs should only be used when prescribed by a doctor and taken under medical supervision.

It is important to note that taking these antiviral drugs indiscriminately without

medical supervision will raise the risk of viruses developing resistance and reducing the effectiveness of the drugs.

- **No licensed generic versions of Tamiflu and Relenza:** Consumers should not purchase products claiming to be "generic" versions of Tamiflu® and Relenza® as to-date, HSA has not licensed any generic products that contain the two active antiviral drugs.
- **No H1N1 flu home test kits:** Currently, there are no over-the-counter (OTC) diagnostic test kits available for individuals to conduct self-diagnosis at home for Influenza A (H1N1-2009) virus. The test kits, which are promoted via websites or emails, are unlikely to provide results that are reliable and accurate.

[B] Know your sources

- **Avoid buying health products from:**
 - **Unlicensed and illegal Internet pharmacies:** A significant number of online pharmacies offering free medical consultation and prescription drugs without a physical consultation are unlicensed.
 - **Random websites, auction sites and electronic flyers sent via emails:** These may offer health products for sale at attractive prices that are much lower than the usual market prices.
 - **Spam emails, forum postings and “blogshops”:** Such operators are usually unknown and do not provide clear contact details that allow them to be identified or traced.
- Consumers purchasing health products from illegal and unlicensed sources may end up not only wasting their money when they do not even receive the goods that they paid for, but, more importantly, are subjecting themselves to unnecessary health risks when they take these products. Please refer to **Annex A** for more details on the risks of buying health products from the Internet.

[C] Beware of advertising gimmicks

- **Be wary and discerning of advertising gimmicks** such as:
 - **“Scientific evidence” claims:** Some dealers may claim that their products have been developed based on “scientific studies” and “evidence”. Such scientific evidence is often lacking and cannot be verified, especially where newly emerging diseases such as Influenza A (H1N1-2009) are concerned.
 - **“100%” claims:** Dealers who claim that their products are “100% guaranteed” or “100% safe” are misleading consumers as no health products can be guaranteed to be totally risk-free. In addition, HSA had previously detected health products which were labelled to contain “100% natural” or

“100% herbal” ingredients, but were found laced with potent medicinal ingredients.

- **“Miracle Cures” claims:** The term “miracle cures” may be used by dealers to promote their products, and consumers should be highly suspicious of such excessive claims.

[D] Report suspicious sales to HSA

- HSA would like to encourage the media and public to partner us in our efforts to combat the sale of illegal, counterfeit and substandard health products related to Influenza A (H1N1-2009). Please call **Tel: 6866 3485** (24-hour line) or **Email: hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg** to report any suspicious sale of illegal health products.

HEALTH PRACTICES TO STAYING FLU-FREE

5 HSA would like to advise consumers that they can take simple steps to protect themselves from the flu, which include:

- maintaining high standards of personal hygiene, e.g. washing hands frequently with soap and water, especially after contact with respiratory secretions (e.g., after sneezing and coughing);
- building up immunity, e.g. through a balanced and healthy diet, regular exercise and having sufficient sleep;
- seeing a doctor when experiencing flu-like symptoms and staying at home.

6 More flu prevention tips are available at the websites of the Ministry of Health (<http://www.moh.gov.sg/>) and Health Promotion Board (<http://www.hpb.gov.sg/>).

ADVICE TO DEALERS

7 Under the current regulations, it is illegal for anyone to deal in any medicinal product in Singapore without approval from HSA.

8 HSA would therefore like to take this opportunity to remind those who intend to deal in medicines or health products over the Internet to first check and familiarise themselves with any regulatory requirements or controls that may be applicable to them, so as to avoid inadvertently contravening the law in Singapore.

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, 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. It operates the national blood bank, Bloodbank@HSA, securing the nation's 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/>.

- **About HSA's Health Products Regulation Group**

The Health Products Regulation Group (HPRG) of HSA ensures that drugs, innovative therapeutics, medical devices and health-related products are wisely regulated and meet appropriate safety, quality and efficacy standards.

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RISKS OF BUYING HEALTH PRODUCTS FROM THE INTERNET

1. Risk of Counterfeits

Consumers should be aware that the Internet can be easily used by counterfeiters as a channel to take advantage of the current outbreak to prey on innocent purchasers.

Often, medicines purchased via spam mails or via Internet websites run a high risk of being substandard or counterfeit. Such medicines may contain no active ingredients, too much or too little of the active ingredients, or even no active ingredients, making them unsafe, ineffective and dangerous to public health and safety.

2. Risk of Undeclared Ingredients

There is no assurance on the safety, quality and efficacy of medicines ordered from spam mails and Internet websites, as they have not been evaluated by the authorities and may contain undeclared ingredients, such as potent prescription medicines that need to be taken under close medical supervision. Instead of preventing or treating a medical condition, the unsupervised use of such medicines may lead to serious reactions, complications or even death!

3. Risk of Poor Quality Products

Unapproved medicines may not have been manufactured under quality assurance procedures and programmes that regulatory systems set in place to protect the integrity (safety, quality and efficacy) of the product.

4. Risk of Unsupervised Use

Some medicines, especially Prescription-Only-Medicines (POMs) such as Tamiflu, may be unsafe when taken without proper medical supervision. You should not self-medicate with POMs. A medical consultation ensures that the medication is appropriate for you and your condition. Such consultations would help to ensure that you are taking the drug properly, that it is working for you and that you are not having unexpected or life-threatening side effects.

5. Risk of Unsubstantiated / Exaggerated Claims

All details in approved medicines' product labels and inserts are evaluated and cleared by regulatory authorities. Product labels and inserts of medicines ordered from overseas sites may carry wrong indications, and include instructions for use and information on possible side effects in a language which you do not understand.