



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE
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HSA SEIZES MORE THAN 25,000 UNITS OF ILLEGAL HEALTH PRODUCTS WORTH ABOUT \$21,000 DURING WEEK-LONG INTERNATIONALLY-COORDINATED ENFORCEMENT OPERATION

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) seized more than 25,000 units of illegal health products during Operation Pangea, a week-long, Internet-based enforcement action coordinated by INTERPOL. From 29 May to 7 June 2016, HSA intensified its surveillance against local websites that sell potentially dangerous health products to consumers, and detected illegal health products that were being sold online in Singapore. The products seized by HSA included anabolic steroids, sleeping pills, pregnancy test kits, and medicinal drugs for infertility and weight loss, with an estimated street value of \$21,000. A total of 8 persons are currently assisting HSA in the investigations. Please refer to **Annex A** for photographs of the products seized.

2 The seized products included 5,812 units of anabolic steroids with a street value of about \$13,000. Investigation revealed that three individuals were involved in the online sale of these products, which are prescription-only medicines used in the treatment of hormonal deficiency conditions. Preliminary findings showed that they were selling an assortment of anabolic steroids on various e-commerce platforms and local gymnasiums at almost double the price they had paid, and marketed them as being able to increase muscle mass, strength and weight loss. The three sellers are currently assisting in the investigations.

3 Aside from the period of intensified surveillance during Operation Pangea, HSA has been working with major local e-commerce websites and local online forums to detect and remove posts that sell illegal health products. These websites also provide advisories to inform users on what health products cannot be sold online.

4 Over the years, HSA has stepped up public education to raise awareness on the dangers of buying such illegal products and health products from dubious sources. This is with the aim of reducing the demand for illegal health products through pro-active educational efforts. More information can be found at www.healthdangers.sg.

Advisory

5 Anabolic steroids are prescription-only medicines that mimic the effects of the male hormone, testosterone. They are used in the treatment of hormonal deficiency conditions and should only be taken under medical supervision. Anabolic steroids are not approved for use to increase muscle mass or boost athletic performance.

Taking such medication without medical supervision can be dangerous as they can cause serious side effects such as insomnia, irritability, aggressive behaviour, hypertension, liver cancer, development of prominent breasts in men and impotence.

6 Sleeping pills are prescription-only medicines used to help people sleep and should only be taken under medical supervision. These drugs can cause drowsiness which can lead to serious accidents during driving or operation of heavy machineries. It may be dangerous for patients to take these drugs unsupervised, especially if the amount taken is too large or if they are also taking other medications which can cause excessive drowsiness.

7 The slimming drugs approved locally are either prescription or pharmacy-only medicines which should only be taken under the supervision of a healthcare professional. Consumers should be aware that there is no quick and easy way to lose weight. Weight management is about achieving and maintaining a lifestyle that incorporates the principles of healthy eating and active living.

8 Many consumers order health products from websites believing they will receive the approved health products. However, the products they eventually receive may turn out to be illegal, counterfeit or substandard, and may contain potent undeclared ingredients which could be harmful to one's health. The health hazards associated with illegal health products are very real and could have serious health consequences.

9 HSA would like to remind consumers of the dangers of purchasing health products from makeshift stalls, street peddlers, as well as unknown or dubious websites. Consumers should also seek early and proper medical attention for management of their medical conditions, instead of self-medicating.

10 It is illegal to import and sell prescription medicines without a licence. Sellers should be cautious when sourcing for health products to sell and are reminded of their responsibility in ensuring the safety of the products and adherence to local legislations prior to introducing them to the market. HSA takes a serious view against those engaged in the sale and supply of illegal health products and will take strong enforcement action against such persons.

11 Anyone convicted of selling illegal health products may be liable for prosecution under the Health Products Act, Poisons Act and/or Medicines Act. Offenders will face a penalty fine of up to \$100,000 and/or imprisonment for a period of up to three years under the Health Products Act; a penalty fine of up to \$10,000 and/or imprisonment for a period of up to two years under the Poisons Act and a penalty fine of up to \$5,000 and/or imprisonment for a period of up to two years under the Medicines Act.

12 Members of the public who encounter illegal, counterfeit or other suspicious health products are encouraged to contact the Enforcement Branch of HSA at Tel: 68663485 or email: hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg. Additionally, members of the public are encouraged to visit www.healthdangers.sg to learn more about the dangers of buying illegal health products from dubious sources.

Operation Pangea

13 Operation Pangea is an international Internet week of action targeting the illegal online sale of counterfeit and unlicensed medicines. HSA was among 193 participating agencies and 103 countries in this global Internet-based action coordinated by INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the Permanent Forum of International Pharmaceutical Crime (PFIPC), the Heads of Medicines Agencies Working Group of Enforcement Officers (HMA WGEO), the pharmaceutical industry and the electronic payments industry. The global operation targets the three main components of the illegal website trade and the people behind the illegal activity: the Internet infrastructure, the electronic payment system and the delivery service. This is the 9th year that HSA is taking part in this operation.

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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 on Twitter at www.twitter.com/HSASg.

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. It contributes to the development of biomedical sciences in Singapore by administering a robust, scientific and responsive regulatory framework.

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Photographs of the Seized Products

