



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE
15 JULY 2013**

HSA SEIZES 2,000 LITRES OF ILLEGAL CODEINE COUGH SYRUP WORTH S\$1.25 MILLION IN JOINT-AGENCY CRACKDOWN

A 3-month investigation carried out by the Health Sciences Authority (HSA), supported by the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB), has led to the seizure of almost 2,000 litres of codeine cough syrup estimated to be worth S\$1.25 million in street value. This joint-agency operation, which took place from April to July, was held as part of HSA's on-going efforts to tackle the illegal import and supply of codeine cough syrup and is one of the biggest crackdowns in terms of volume seized from the illegal supply chain. The operation was targeted against a suspected codeine syndicate which carried out their illegal activity at various locations. Four Singaporean men were arrested and are currently assisting HSA with investigations.

2 The illegal import of codeine-based syrup was first detected by the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) officers at Keppel Distripark on 28 March. The case was referred to HSA for further investigation, which revealed that 3.8-litre canisters of illegal cough syrup were brought in under the guise of other products such as tire shine, porcelain cleaners and degreasers. Follow up investigations by HSA showed that the suspects brought the canisters of codeine to a residential unit and another rented storage facility, where they were processed and repackaged into smaller quantities, before being distributed to the black market. Please refer to the **Annex** for photos.

Codeine Cough Syrups

3 Codeine cough syrups are used medically as a cough suppressant. They are classified as pharmacy-only-medicines and can only be supplied by a licensed pharmacist or a licensed medical practitioner. Codeine cough syrups, if used without proper medical supervision, can often lead to dependence, as well as other side effects such as nausea, vomiting, constipation and confusion. When taken in excess, they may cause hallucinations, decreased heart rate and breathing, leading to coma and death.

Summary

4 HSA takes a serious stand against such illegal activities and will continue to step up our enforcement efforts against such offences. Under the Poisons Act, anyone caught importing, selling or possessing products containing codeine without a licence can be fined up to \$10,000 or jailed up to 2 years or both.

5 Said Associate Professor Chan Cheng Leng, Deputy Group Director of the Health Products Regulation Group, HSA: "Codeine cough syrups should only be dispensed for medical use by licensed pharmacists or doctors. If used improperly and illegally, these syrups

can lead to serious health consequences. Through close collaboration with CNB and ICA, we were able to successfully uncover this illegal supply of codeine cough syrup and prevent further harm to the public. HSA will continue to step up our efforts and work with the relevant agencies on raid operations in targeted areas to disrupt the illegal supply of such medicines.”

6 Members of the public who have encountered any illegal activity involving codeine cough syrup are encouraged to report them to the Enforcement Branch of HSA at Tel: 68663485 or Email: hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg

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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](https://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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