



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE
3 JUNE 2015**

HSA ALERTS PUBLIC TO TWO ILLEGAL PAIN RELIEF PRODUCTS PEDDLED LOCALLY WHICH LED TO ONE CONSUMER BEING HOSPITALISED

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is alerting members of the public not to purchase or consume two illegal health products sold locally which had caused one consumer to be hospitalised from serious adverse reactions. Investigations by HSA are ongoing and laboratory tests have detected the following undeclared potent western medicinal ingredients in these two illegal products:

| Illegal products | Western medicinal ingredients detected |
|---|--|
| 'Powder packed in unlabelled pink sachet' | Chlorpheniramine, Dexamethasone |
| Black Pills labelled '特效风湿丸' ('special effect rheumatism pill') | Chlorpheniramine, Dexamethasone and Bromhexine |

Please see **Annex A** for pictures of the products.

2 A patient in her 40s was hospitalised for delirium (confusion), high blood sugar, electrolyte imbalance in her blood and suspected Cushing's syndrome (characterised by a round face or 'moon face' and upper body obesity with thin limbs), after consuming the powder packed in unlabelled pink sachets. The patient had been taking the powder for pain relief over a prolonged period due to her belief in its 'miraculous powers'. The powder was sold to the consumer by a local Chinese female peddler in her 60s. The peddler was known to only sell to individuals with whom she was familiar and would personally deliver the products to the addresses provided by her customers. She was known to them as the 'auntie who sells powdered medicine'. Upon HSA's detection of the undeclared potent medicinal ingredients in the pink sachets, HSA enforcement officers raided the peddler's home and uncovered another illegal health product which were black pills labelled '特效风湿丸' ('special effect rheumatism pill'). Both products claimed to treat rheumatism and pain, and were sold by word of mouth.

Undeclared potent western medicinal ingredients found in the illegal products

3 Dexamethasone is a potent steroid usually prescribed for inflammatory conditions and should only be used under strict medical supervision. Long term unsupervised use of oral steroids can cause Cushing's syndrome, increased blood sugar levels leading to diabetes, high blood pressure, cataracts, muscular and bone disorders, and an increased risk of infections. Please refer to **Annex B** for more information on the potential adverse reactions of the other undeclared medicinal ingredients found in these products.

Consumer advisory

4 Members of the public who have purchased or are consuming these products are advised to:

- Consult a doctor as soon as possible before stopping the use of the 'powder packed in unlabelled pink sachet' and black pills labelled '特效风湿丸' ('special effect rheumatism pill'). Sudden discontinuation of steroids without proper medical supervision can cause serious withdrawal symptoms such as weakness, fatigue, confusion and low blood pressure, especially when it has been consumed for more than a few weeks.
- Avoid buying health products from street peddlers, unknown websites or sellers, or even from well-meaning friends or relatives. You cannot be certain where and how these products were made. They may be illegal, counterfeit or substandard, and may contain undeclared ingredients which can harm your health. Do not gamble with your health.
- Be wary of health products which are not properly labelled with their ingredients or which promise miraculous effects with exaggerated claims like 'instant pain relief'. Such products may contain undeclared potent ingredients that can seriously harm your health.
- Seek appropriate medical treatment from a doctor for the management of acute and chronic medical symptoms and conditions (such as arthritis and rheumatism). Do not self-medicate as you may not be aware of the possible adverse reactions the medication can cause or drug interactions it may have with other medications you are taking.

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.

5 HSA will take strong enforcement actions against those who engage in the sale and supply of illegal health products containing potent medicinal ingredients. Anyone found to contravene the Poisons Act faces a penalty of up to \$10,000 and/or imprisonment for a period of up to two years.

6 Members of the public who have any information on the sale and supply of these two illegal products or other 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.

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SINGAPORE
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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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I. 'Powder packed in unlabelled pink sachet' found in peddler's home



II. Black pills labelled ‘特效风湿丸’ (‘special effect rheumatism pill’) found in peddler’s home



POSSIBLE ADVERSE REACTIONS OF THE UNDECLARED POTENT WESTERN MEDICINAL INGREDIENTS

| Undeclared ingredients | Possible Adverse Reactions |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Chlorpheniramine | Drowsiness, constipation, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting |
| Dexamethasone | Diabetes, high blood pressure, cataracts, increased risk of infections, Cushing's syndrome, osteoporosis, depression, confusion |
| Bromhexine | Diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting |