



HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE
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HSA SEIZES MORE THAN 39,000 UNITS OF ILLEGAL HEALTH PRODUCTS CONTAINING BANNED SUBSTANCES WITH STREET VALUE OF OVER \$133,000 DURING INTERPOL-COORDINATED INTERNATIONAL OPERATION

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) participated in the tenth instalment of Operation Pangea, coordinated by INTERPOL, from 12 to 19 September 2017. During the week, HSA intensified surveillance against local websites to detect and disrupt the online sale of illegal health products. More than 39,000 units of illegal health products including weight loss products, sexual enhancement drugs (SEDs) and cosmetics were seized, with an estimated total street value of over \$133,000. Three persons are currently assisting HSA in the investigations. Please refer to **Annex A** for photographs of the products seized.

2 Of the weight loss products seized and tested, 90% was found to contain the banned substance, sibutramine. Some of the products also contained other potent medicinal ingredients such as diuretics (to help the body get rid of excess fluid) and antihistamines (for relief of allergies). These adulterated products include 'DZ Garcinia Herbal Plus', 'Gorgeousleem Advanced Capsule', 'Figure-Up Slimming Pill' and 'XXS Advance'.

3 Aside from weight loss products, several brands of cosmetic products were seized. Notably, 'Tati Skincare', an illegal cosmetic product which HSA had alerted the public to in June 2017¹ for its high mercury level and potent prohibited ingredients, resurfaced online in September 2017, advertised as a "new and improved Tati Skincare". Repackaging the same product is a tactic undertaken by illegal manufacturers in an attempt to evade authorities' detection and entice consumers. Analysis of the newly-packaged 'Tati Skincare' found that like its predecessor, there was purposeful addition of potent ingredients. For example, 'Therapy Cream 1' contained high levels of mercury while 'Therapy Cream 2' contained hydroquinone and tretinoin.

4 We are directing website administrators to remove these advertisements that were posted online so as to curb further sales of these illegal products to the public.

¹ http://www.hsa.gov.sg/content/hsa/en/News_Events/Press_Releases/2017/tatiskincare5in1.html

Constant demand for lifestyle health products

5 Through the ten years of participation in Operation Pangea, HSA observed that lifestyle health products such as weight loss products, cosmetics and contact lenses, continue to be the primary concern.

6 Associate Professor Chan Cheng Leng, Group Director of HSA's Health Products Regulation Group, shares:

“While HSA continues in its effort to disrupt the online sale of illegal health products, consumers also play an important role in safeguarding their own health by being aware of the risks associated with internet purchase of health products. Be wary of products that claim quick and effective cures as they may be adulterated with potent ingredients, and pose serious danger to consumers.”

Weight loss products

7 Weight loss products has been a recurring problem. These products range from pills to beverages, and are labelled with exaggerated claims such as “100% natural”, “herbal ingredients” and “quick effect”. From 2012 to 2016, 35 different products marketed for weight loss were tested and found to be adulterated with sibutramine, a banned substance. Sibutramine was previously available as a prescription-only weight loss drug but has been withdrawn from Singapore since 2010, due to an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes, as well as other serious adverse effects. From 2011 to May 2017, HSA received five serious adverse event reports associated with the use of sibutramine. These included hallucinations, hearing of voices, palpitations and breathlessness.

8 Aside from sibutramine, some of the weight loss products detected this year contained other potent medicinal ingredients. ‘XXS Advance’ was tested to contain frusemide, a diuretic that increases water loss, and diphenhydramine, an antihistamine used to relieve symptoms of allergy. Tests on ‘Gorgeousleem Advanced Capsule’ showed that it contains spironolactone, a diuretic used to reduce fluid build-up in the body. Consumers could unknowingly consume these potent ingredients, which pose a danger to their health.

Consumer advisory

9 Members of the public are advised that:

- Weight loss drugs that are approved by HSA are available only from a doctor or pharmacist as these are potent medications and should only be taken under medical supervision. There is no quick and easy way to lose weight – it’s about achieving and maintaining a lifestyle that incorporates the principles of healthy eating and active living.
- Caution is needed when buying health products online. There is no knowing who the sellers are, where they obtained the products, how the products were made, and what they contain. The products could

potentially be counterfeits or adulterated with undeclared potent or banned ingredients which can seriously harm one's health. The health hazards associated with illegal health products are very real and could have serious health consequences. Do not gamble with your health.

- Be wary of health products that promise quick and miraculous results or carry exaggerated claims like “100% safe”, “no side effects” or “scientifically proven”.
- Products bought online may be cheaper and appear to be of better value. In reality however, the lower price could be due to unsafe or inferior ingredients, poor manufacturing methods and substandard or unhygienic storage conditions.

Efforts in public education

10 Apart from the period of intensified surveillance during Operation Pangea, HSA works regularly with local e-commerce websites and online forums to detect and remove posts that sell illegal health products. These websites also provide advisories to inform sellers on the types of health products that cannot be sold online.

11 Over the years, HSA has worked to raise the awareness on the dangers of buying illegal health products from dubious sources through press releases, advisories and public education campaigns. The objective is that through pro-active educational efforts, demand for illegal health products can be reduced. More information can be found at www.healthdangers.sg.

Sale and supply of illegal health products

12 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. Anyone who supplies illegal health products is liable to prosecution and if convicted, may be imprisoned for up to 3 years and/or fined up to \$100,000.

13 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.

Operation Pangea

14 Operation Pangea is an international Internet week of action targeting the illegal online sale of counterfeit and unlicensed medicines. HSA was among 197 participating agencies and 126 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.

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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



DZ Garcinia Herbal Plus

Found to contain Sibutramine and Phenolphthalein



XXS Advance

Found to contain Diphenhydramine and Frusemide



Figure-Up
Found to contain Sibutramine and Phenolphthalein



Gorgeousleem Advanced Capsule
Found to contain Sibutramine and Spironolactone



Tati Skincare Therapy Cream 1 and Therapy Cream 2
Found to contain Mercury, Hydroquinone and Tretinoin



AQ Chantique
Found to contain Salicylic Acid, Mercury, Hydroquinone



Bee Venom 4 in 1
Found to contain Mercury



Luxury Signature

Found to contain Mercury, Hydroquinone and Salicylic Acid



Candy B Complex
 Found to contain Tadalafil

