



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY  
PRESS RELEASE  
17 OCTOBER 2017

## HSA ALERT: MAN HOSPITALISED AFTER TAKING ILLEGAL PILLS AND CAPSULES SUPPLIED BY TRADITIONAL MASSEUR

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is alerting members of the public not to consume unlabelled, illegal pills and capsules supplied locally by “Samsudin Traditional Massager”. The business is operated by a male Indian traditional masseur in his 50s, in a residential unit at Teck Whye Lane. One consumer was hospitalised after consuming these pills.

2 HSA tested the products and found that they contain undeclared potent western medicinal ingredients such as dexamethasone (a potent steroid), frusemide (a diuretic that helps the body get rid of excess fluid) and chlorpheniramine (an anti-allergenic pill).

Illegal health products	Undeclared western medicinal ingredients
Unlabelled black pills	Dexamethasone
Unlabelled green and white capsules (with small wording ‘J-AJAIB-PLUS’ on capsule)	Dexamethasone
Unlabelled brown pills	Chlorpheniramine, Dexamethasone and Frusemide
Unlabelled brown capsules	Chlorpheniramine, Dexamethasone, Diclofenac and Frusemide

Please refer to **Annex A** for pictures of the products, and **Annex B** for more information about the western medicinal ingredients found in the products.

### ADVERSE EVENT REPORTED

3 A man in his 20s who consumed the unlabelled black round pills and brown capsules for over a year was hospitalised. He had Cushing’s syndrome, a condition caused by prolonged consumption of steroids, resulting in a round or ‘moon face’ appearance and upper body obesity with thin limbs. He had also developed purple stretch marks over his arms, abdomen and thighs, and gained 20 kg within a year. The man claimed that these products obtained from the home-based traditional masseur for pain relief had helped to keep his chronic gout condition under control. When he ran out of the products and stopped taking them, he experienced withdrawal

symptoms and was hospitalised. His condition improved upon treatment and he was subsequently discharged from the hospital.

4 HSA has ascertained that these illegal products were given free to his customers after they completed a massage session, for the purpose of pain relief or slimming.

5 HSA officers raided the residential unit and seized about 6,500 units of pills and capsules, which were packed in unlabelled plastic bags and plastic bottles. These products were tested to contain undeclared potent western medicinal ingredients, as detailed in the table in paragraph 2. The traditional masseur is currently assisting HSA in its investigations.

### **ADVISORY TO CONSUMERS**

6 Consumers are advised:

- As the products contain a potent steroid, consumers who have consumed the unlabelled products obtained from the traditional masseur should see a doctor as soon as possible. Discontinuation of steroids without proper medical supervision can cause serious withdrawal symptoms such as fatigue, confusion and low blood pressure.
- Be cautious when purchasing products from unfamiliar sources, even if they are recommended by friends and relatives. You cannot be certain what these products contain, and where and how they were made.
- Be wary of complementary health products (e.g. traditional medicines, health supplements) that promise or produce unexpected quick results for chronic conditions. Such products may contain prescription medicines which should only be taken under medical supervision, or potent or banned ingredients that may harm you.
- Consult your doctor or pharmacist to manage your acute and chronic medical symptoms and conditions (such as joint pain, arthritis and rheumatism).

### **ADVISORY TO SELLERS AND SUPPLIERS**

7 Sellers and suppliers are warned that:

- It is illegal to sell and supply complementary health products (e.g., traditional medicines, health supplements) containing potent western medicines or banned substances.
- 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.

8 Members of the public who have any information on the sale and supply of these 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](mailto:hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg).

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY  
SINGAPORE  
17 OCTOBER 2017**

---

### **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](http://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.

**HSA ALERT: MAN HOSPITALISED AFTER TAKING ILLEGAL PILLS  
AND CAPSULES SUPPLIED BY TRADITIONAL MASSEUR**

**Black pills in unlabelled plastic bags**



**Green and white capsules in unlabelled plastic bags**



**Brown capsules in unlabelled plastic pill pouches**



**Close-up view of brown capsules**



**Brown pills in unlabelled plastic bottle**



**Close-up view of brown pills**



**INFORMATION ON UNDECLARED WESTERN MEDICINAL INGREDIENTS  
FOUND IN THE PRODUCTS**

**Dexamethasone**

Dexamethasone is a potent steroid that is 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 (which is characterised by a round or 'moon face' and upper body obesity with thin limbs), increased blood glucose levels leading to diabetes, high blood pressure, cataracts, muscular and bone disorders, and an increased risk of infections.

**Diclofenac**

Diclofenac is a potent painkiller and may potentially cause serious gastric bleeding, as well as heart attacks and stroke when used for a prolonged period. It should be used under close medical supervision, especially in patients with underlying heart conditions.

**Frusemide**

Frusemide is a potent diuretic drug that is used to eliminate water and salt from the body. When taken in excess, the 'water-eliminating' effect of frusemide can cause the depletion of sodium, chloride, body water and other minerals in the body.

**Chlorpheniramine**

Chlorpheniramine is an antihistamine used to relieve allergic reactions, such as hay fever, rhinitis, urticaria and asthma. Unsupervised use of chlorpheniramine can cause adverse effects which include drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and constipation.