

CHP urges public not to use unsafe whitening creams (with photos)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (August 19) appealed to members of the public not to buy or use two whitening cream products (see photos) as they may contain excessive mercury, which is harmful to health.

The appeal followed the CHP's receipt of notification of a case of suspected mercury poisoning from the Hospital Authority (HA) involving a 36-year-old female patient. The CHP commenced investigations immediately.

The patient was found to have proteinuria (presence of excess proteins in urine) after admission to hospital in late July 2021 and reported using the two products for around three months. Her urine sample revealed a mercury level higher than the reference level, which was clinically suspected to be related to the use of the products.

Testing by the HA revealed that the levels of mercury in these two products were 1 152 times (day cream) and 2 056 times (night cream) the acceptable level. The CHP's investigation is continuing. The case has also been referred to the relevant law enforcement agency for follow-up.

"Chronic exposure to mercury can cause damage to the nervous system and kidneys. Symptoms may include tremors, irritability, insomnia, memory deterioration, concentration difficulty, impaired hearing and vision, and change in the taste function. In severe cases, renal failure may occur," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"As the content of mercury in these two products far exceeded the acceptable level, their use may cause serious side effects. People who are using them should stop immediately and consult healthcare professionals as soon as possible if they feel unwell or are in doubt. Members of the public are urged not to buy or use cosmetic products of unknown composition or obtained from doubtful sources," the spokesman added.

