

# DH reminds public of deregistration of pharmaceutical products containing pholcodine with effect from January 1, 2024

The Department of Health (DH) today (December 18) reminded the public that pharmaceutical products containing pholcodine will be deregistered and cannot be sold on the market with effect from January 1, 2024.

Pholcodine is a centrally acting cough suppressant, which is used in adults and children to treat a non-productive cough. After taking into consideration various factors including the latest recommendations on pholcodine by overseas regulatory authorities, and advice given by local experts that the use of pholcodine in the 12 months before general anaesthesia with neuromuscular blocking agents (NMBAs) is a risk for developing NMBA anaphylaxis, the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong decided to deregister pharmaceutical products containing pholcodine with effect from January 1, 2024. A [press release](#) together with a list of 27 affected products (these products are listed in the Attachment) was issued on July 7 this year to announce the decision. The DH had also issued letters to healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical traders to inform them of the decision and requested the drug manufacturers and wholesale dealers concerned to recall their pharmaceutical products from the market.

"The DH has issued reminder letters to healthcare professionals and the certificate holders concerned again regarding the commencement date of deregistration of the products. Patients who are still using the pharmaceutical products concerned should contact healthcare professionals immediately for switching to suitable alternative treatments," a spokesman for the DH said.

"With effect from January 1, 2024, all drug manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers and healthcare professionals must stop selling or supplying pharmaceutical products containing pholcodine. Drug manufacturers and wholesalers must recall all products concerned from the market by December 31 this year. The DH will take enforcement action against any illegal possession or sale of pharmaceutical products containing pholcodine from January 1 next year," the spokesman added.

Under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138), illegal sale or possession of unregistered pharmaceutical products and Part 1 poisons is a criminal offence. The maximum penalty for each offence upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and two years' imprisonment.