

First successful prosecution case against counterfeit vaccines

A male company director of a medical centre was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and the centre was fined \$20,000 by Kwun Tong Magistrates' Courts on June 5 for violating the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO) for possession of vaccines bearing a forged trademark for sale or for any purpose. This is the first such case effected by Hong Kong Customs as well as the first successful prosecution involving counterfeit vaccines.

Customs today (June 16) welcomed the sentences, saying that the custodial sentences imposed a considerable deterrent effect and delivered a clear warning to medical centres about using counterfeit medical products. It also reflected the seriousness of the relevant offences.

Acting on information alleging the use of counterfeit human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines, Customs and the Department of Health conducted a joint enforcement action in July last year and seized a batch of 76 boxes of counterfeit vaccines at a medical centre in Kwun Tong.

Customs reminds traders, especially medical centres, to be cautious and prudent in the merchandising of vaccines since the possession of counterfeit goods for any trade or business is a serious crime and offenders are liable to criminal sanctions. Customs also reminds consumers to select reputable medical centres with care and verify with the trademark owners or their authorised agents if the authenticity of a vaccine is in doubt.

Under the TDO, any person who sells or possesses for sale any goods with a forged trademark commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Members of the public may report any suspected counterfeiting activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).