

## Hong Kong Customs and Department of Health continue joint operation to combat counterfeit vaccines (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs and the Department of Health (DH) conducted a joint operation and raided a medical centre in Tsim Sha Tsui on July 12. A total of 162 boxes of suspected counterfeit vaccines and 163 boxes of vaccines containing Part 1 poison with an estimated market value of about \$750,000 in total were seized.

The DH earlier received a complaint alleging the use of a suspected problematic human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine by a medical centre and conducted a joint investigation with Customs. After preliminary investigation with the assistance of the trademark owner, officers from Customs and the DH conducted joint enforcement action on July 12 and raided a medical centre located at a commercial building in Tsim Sha Tsui where the suspected counterfeit vaccines and vaccines containing Part 1 poison were seized. Samples of the vaccines will be sent to the Government Laboratory for analysis.

A 35-year-old female director and two female staff members of the medical centre, aged 27 and 30, were arrested.

Investigations by Customs and the DH are ongoing.

Customs 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. Customs also reminds registered healthcare professionals to be cautious and prudent in 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.

The DH urged members of the public who have felt unwell after receiving HPV vaccines to seek advice from healthcare professionals. According to the recommendation of the World Health Organization, the primary target group for cervical cancer vaccination is young women aged 9 to 14 years prior to becoming sexually active. Members of the public who have doubts on whether they should vaccinate or receive booster vaccines are advised to consult healthcare professionals. In addition, registered healthcare professionals should only procure registered pharmaceutical products from licensed wholesale dealers.

Under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance, 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.

Under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance, any person who possesses any poison included in Part 1 of the Poisons List other than in accordance with provisions commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for two years.

