

Hong Kong Customs announces eight types of surgical masks suspected of exceeding bacterial limit in one month (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs today (April 17) appealed to members of the public to stop using four types of surgical masks as test results revealed that the bacterial counts of those four types of surgical masks exceeded the maximum permitted limit. Traders should remove the products from shelves as well. Including these four types of surgical masks, Customs has in the past month or so announced a total of eight types of surgical mask products with bacterial counts exceeded the maximum permitted limit, in contravention of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO).

Customs yesterday (April 16) received the test results of the latest batch of 24 test-purchased surgical mask samples. According to the relevant hygienic standard for disposable sanitary products, the total bacterial counts of samples of four types of surgical masks exceeded the maximum permitted limit by 0.2 to 1.35 times, in contravention of the CGSO.

The four types of surgical masks were packed in boxes of 50 pieces each, with the selling prices ranging from \$150 to \$280. All four samples had no manufacturing place labels. It is believed that they came from Southeast and West Asian countries according to initial investigation.

Noting the test results, Customs today conducted immediate enforcement action and searched four retail spots located in Causeway Bay, North Point and Sheung Shui, comprising a pharmacy, a grocery store, a shop selling daily necessities and a fruit store. Four directors were arrested. No further seizure of the four types of surgical masks suspected of exceeding the limit of total bacterial count was made.

The three men and one woman arrested, aged between 34 and 54, are now being detained for further investigation. Customs will further examine the four types of surgical masks to establish the types of bacteria present.

Apart from the four retail spots in connection with the cases, Customs officers also checked multiple retail spots in various districts today and no such products were found for sale. Customs is undertaking in-depth investigation on the source of those surgical masks. The likelihood of further arrests is not excluded.

In view of the development of the COVID-19 epidemic, Customs launched a large-scale territory-wide special operation codenamed "Guardian" on January 27 this year to conduct spot checks, test purchases and inspections in various districts on surgical masks available in the market. Samples of masks were also sent to the laboratory for tests on bacterial counts. To date,

Customs has already test-purchased over 160 types of surgical masks for tests on bacterial counts. A total of 111 samples have been tested for bacterial count, among which 103 samples of surgical masks complied with the bacterial count standard.

Apart from the four samples announced in this round, Customs has also announced another four types of surgical masks with bacterial counts exceeding the maximum permitted limit on March 14, of which the total bacterial counts exceeded the maximum permitted limit by 0.4 to 11.5 times

Customs reminds members of the public to observe the following tips when purchasing and using surgical masks:

- Read carefully the instructions on the packages in the purchasing process;
- Check if there is any damage or dirt on the packages and stop using surgical masks with stains or odd smells;
- Pay attention to the proper way of using surgical masks;
- Change surgical masks at a suitable time;
- Store surgical masks in dry places; and
- Purchase at reputable retail shops.

The "Guardian" operation has been running for over 80 days to date. More than 4 000 officers have been mobilised to conduct over 27 000 inspections at retail spots in various districts to ensure that common protective items sold in the market comply with the CGSO and the Trade Descriptions Ordinance.

