

# Hong Kong Customs urges public to stop using one type of surgical mask suspected of exceeding bacterial limit (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs today (June 12) appealed to members of the public to stop using one type of surgical mask as test results revealed that the bacterial count of the mask exceeded the maximum permitted limit, in contravention of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO). Traders should remove the product from shelves as well.

Customs yesterday (June 11) received the test results of the latest batch of 38 test-purchased surgical mask samples. According to the relevant hygienic standard for disposable sanitary products, the total bacterial count of the sample of one type of surgical mask exceeded the maximum permitted limit by 25 per cent, in contravention of the CGSO.

The surgical mask concerned was packed in boxes of 10 pieces each with individual packaging and was sold for \$180. The manufacturing place is China as marked on the box. Customs officers test-purchased the mask from a pharmacy in Tsim Sha Tsui in May this year.

Noting the test result, Customs today conducted immediate enforcement action and seized four boxes of the mask from the pharmacy concerned. A 58-year-old man-in-charge was arrested and is now being detained for further investigation. Customs will further examine the surgical mask involved to establish the types of bacteria present.

Apart from the pharmacy in connection with the case, Customs officers also checked multiple retail spots in various districts today and no such product was found for sale. Customs is undertaking in-depth investigation on the source of the mask. 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 440 types of surgical masks for tests on bacterial counts and, among which, 318 samples have been tested for bacterial count.

Apart from the sample announced in this round, Customs has also announced a further nine types of surgical masks with bacterial counts exceeding the maximum permitted limit on March 14, April 17 and June 3, of which the total bacterial counts exceeded the maximum permitted limit by 20 per cent to 11.5 times.

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

- Check if there is any dirt on the masks and stop using those 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 surgical masks at reputable retail shops.

The "Guardian" operation has been running for over four and a half months to date. More than 5 100 officers have been mobilised to conduct over 33 000 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.

