

Hong Kong Customs urges public to stop using three types of unsafe whitening cream products (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs today (August 8) urged members of the public to stop using three types of whitening cream products containing excessive mercury.

Customs earlier received a referral from a relevant department regarding a mercury poisoning case after a patient used a type of whitening cream product. The test result revealed that the level of mercury in the product concerned was 23 000 parts per million. Later, Customs discovered that the levels of mercury in two other types of whitening cream products of the same brand reached 24 000 ppm. According to the relevant hygienic standard for cosmetics, the mercury content of the three types of whitening creams exceeded the maximum permitted limit by 23 000 times, 24 000 times and 24 000 times respectively, suspected to be in contravention of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO).

Moreover, Customs also found that the three products concerned only bore warnings or cautions in English, without any Chinese warnings or cautions, suspected to be in contravention of the Consumer Goods Safety Regulation (CGSR), a subsidiary legislation of the CGSO.

Customs immediately conducted an enforcement operation and deployed officers to a retailer concerned in Central to carry out an investigation. A total of 352 boxes of the three types of whitening creams were seized from the retailer. A 40-year-old man-in-charge and a 45-year-old saleswoman were arrested, and they have been released on bail pending further investigation.

The investigation is ongoing, and the likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

A prohibition notice was served on the retailer connected with the case, prohibiting the continued sale of the three whitening cream products.

Apart from searching the retailer connected with the case, Customs officers also conducted spot checks and inspections in various districts, and sales of the three products concerned have not been found so far.

According to medical advice, chronic exposure to mercury can cause damage to the nervous system and kidneys. Symptoms may include tremors, irritability, insomnia, memory deterioration, concentration difficulty, impaired hearing and vision, and change in the taste function. In severe cases, renal failure may occur.

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Customs reminds members of the public to observe the following tips when purchasing and using beauty products:

- Do not buy or use beauty products of unknown composition or from

doubtful sources;

- Stop using the beauty products and seek medical attention immediately if feeling unwell after use; and
- Purchase beauty products at reputable retail shops.

Customs reminds employers that they should get their foreign domestic helpers' attention to stop using the three products concerned immediately if they found that the helpers had purchased the products.

Customs also reminds traders to comply with the statutory requirements of the CGSO to protect the safety of consumers. Under the CGSO, it is an offence to supply, manufacture or import into Hong Kong consumer goods unless the goods comply with the general safety requirements for consumer goods. Under the CGSR, where consumer goods or their packages are marked with warnings or cautions with respect to their safe keeping, use, consumption or disposal, such warnings or cautions shall be in both English and Chinese languages. Moreover, the warning or caution phrases must be legibly and conspicuously shown on the goods, any package of the goods, a label securely affixed to the package or a document enclosed in the package. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year on the first conviction, and \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years on a subsequent conviction.

Customs has been consistently combating the sale of products that fall short of the CGSO. Law enforcement action will be taken immediately if any violation of the CGSO is detected.

Members of the public with information relating to unsafe or law-breaking consumer goods may make a report via Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or by filling in an online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/).



