

Joint operation by Hong Kong Customs and Department of Health to combat counterfeit vaccines (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs and the Department of Health (DH) conducted a joint operation and raided a medical centre in Kwun Tong on July 10. A total of 76 boxes of suspected counterfeit vaccines and 47 boxes of vaccines containing Part I poison with an estimated market value of about \$280,000 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, which may also involve counterfeit products. After receiving the DH's referral, Customs conducted a preliminary investigation with the assistance of the trademark owner. Officers from Customs and the DH conducted joint enforcement action on July 10 and raided a medical centre located at a commercial building in Kwun Tong where the batch of suspected counterfeit vaccines and vaccines containing Part I poison were seized.

A 49-year-old male director and a 33-year-old male staff member of the medical centre were arrested.

Investigations by Customs and the DH are ongoing.

The Head of the Intellectual Property Investigation Bureau of the Customs and Excise Department, Mr Kwan Kin-keung, and the Chief Pharmacist of the DH, Mr Lot Chan, said at a press conference today (July 12) that Customs and the DH will continue to step up enforcement to combat counterfeit vaccines.

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 medical centres 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 doubt 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.

