

Man arrested on suspicion of illegally selling topical eczema product with undeclared controlled drug ingredients

The Department of Health (DH) today (March 26) carried out an enforcement operation with the Police against the suspected illegal sale of a topical product containing undeclared controlled medicines on the Internet, claiming that the product could be used to treat eczema. During the operation, a 42-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of the illegal sale of Part 1 poison and an unregistered pharmaceutical product.

Acting upon a complaint, a sample of the product was purchased from an eczema group on a social media platform for analysis. Test results from the Government Laboratory revealed that the sample contained clobetasol propionate, ketoconazole and miconazole, which are Part 1 poisons under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138). The product, unlabeled, is also suspected to be an unregistered pharmaceutical product. The DH's investigation is still in progress.

Clobetasol propionate is a steroid substance for treating inflammation. Inappropriate application of steroids could cause skin problems and systemic side effects such as moon face, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, adrenal insufficiency and osteoporosis. Ketoconazole and miconazole are antifungal substance used to treat fungal infections with side effects including local irritation and sensitivity reactions.

Topical products containing ketoconazole and miconazole should be supplied in the premises of an Authorized Seller of Poisons (i.e. a pharmacy) under the supervision of a registered pharmacist, while products containing clobetasol propionate are prescription medicines that should be used under a doctor's directions and be supplied in a pharmacy under the supervision of a registered pharmacist upon a doctor's prescription.

According to the Ordinance, all pharmaceutical products must be registered with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong before they can be sold in the market. Illegal sale or possession of unregistered pharmaceutical products or Part 1 poisons are criminal offences. The maximum penalty on conviction of each offence is a fine of \$100,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The DH strongly urged members of the public not to buy or use products of doubtful composition or from unknown sources. All registered pharmaceutical products should carry a Hong Kong registration number on the package in the format of "HK-XXXXX". The safety, quality and efficacy of unregistered pharmaceutical products are not guaranteed.

People who suspect that they have purchased the product concerned should

stop using it immediately and consult healthcare professionals if in doubt or feeling unwell after use. They may submit the product to the Drug Office of the DH at Room 1804-06, 18/F, Wing On Kowloon Centre, 345 Nathan Road, Kowloon, during office hours for disposal.