

Strengthening sales control of codeine-containing medicines effective on January 26

With a view to strengthening the sales control of codeine-containing medicines, the Government will publish the Pharmacy and Poisons (Amendment) Regulation 2024 in the Gazette tomorrow (January 26) to regulate all medicines containing less than 0.2 per cent of codeine as Part 1 Schedule 1 poisons under the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations (the Regulations). The relevant requirements will come into effect on the same day as publication in the Gazette.

A spokesman for the Department of Health (DH) today (January 25) said that the Government has always been concerned about the abuse of codeine-containing medicines (including cough preparations) in Hong Kong. Currently, medicines containing 0.2 per cent or above codeine are Part 1 Schedule 1 Schedule 3 poisons under the Regulations (i.e. prescription drugs) that can only be purchased from Authorized Sellers of Poisons (commonly known as pharmacies) under the supervision of the registered pharmacist upon a doctor's prescription. Medicines containing more than 0.1 per cent codeine (but less than 0.2 per cent) are Part 1 Schedule 1 poisons under the Regulations which should be sold by pharmacies and under the supervision of the registered pharmacist, and the pharmacies should register the personal information of the purchaser (including the name, identity card number, address and signature) etc, in the Poisons Book before the completion of sale. Medicines containing not more than 0.1 per cent codeine are Part 1 poisons under the Regulations which should be sold by pharmacies and under the supervision of a registered pharmacist.

The Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong (the Board) reviews the regulatory control of codeine-containing medicines from time to time and has earlier decided to strengthen the sales control of codeine-containing medicines. According to the Board's decision, medicines containing not more than 0.1 per cent of codeine should also be regulated as a Part 1 Schedule 1 poison under the Regulations to strengthen control. Under the strengthened sales control, the pharmacies have to comply with additional requirements, i.e., register the personal information of the purchaser (including the name, identity card number, address and signature) etc, in the Poisons Book before the completion of sale, while other current control remains unchanged.

Members of the public may continue to legally buy the medicines concerned at pharmacies. With regard to the abovementioned sales control in the retail sectors, the DH has issued letters to notify the relevant stakeholders (including pharmacies) and has requested all pharmacies to display the notice on sales control of the medicines provided by the DH inside their premises.

According to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance, illegal sale of Part 1

poisons or prescription drugs is a criminal offence and the maximum penalty for each offence is a fine of HKD100,000 and two years' imprisonment. Furthermore, any pharmacy who fails to comply with the requirement to make an entry in the Poisons Book before completion of sale of Part 1 Schedule 1 poison under the Regulations shall be liable on conviction to a maximum fine of HKD5,000.

The spokesman emphasised that the DH will enhance its enforcement action against the illegal sale of codeine-containing medicines and failing to keep proper record of poisons. The spokesman also reminded members of the public to take note of the restriction of the retail sales of the medicines concerned.

For more information about the strengthening of the sales control of codeine-containing medicines, the public may visit the [webpage](#) of the DH's Drug Office. The public could also use the [Drug Database](#) of the Drug Office for further details of registered pharmaceutical products.