

CHP urges public not to use unsafe whitening cream (with photos)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (July 14) appealed to members of the public not to buy or use a whitening cream product (see photos) as it may contain excessive mercury, which is harmful to health.

The appeal followed the CHP's receipt of notification of a case of mercury poisoning from the Hospital Authority (HA) involving a 37-year-old female patient. The CHP commenced investigations immediately.

The patient has developed swelling of both lower limbs since mid-June this year and reported using the product for around four months. Her urine sample revealed a mercury level higher than the reference level, which was clinically suspected to be related to the use of the product.

Testing results of the HA's laboratory revealed that the level of mercury in the product submitted by the patient was 16 471 times the acceptable level. The CHP's investigation is continuing. The case has also been referred to the relevant law enforcement agency for follow-up.

"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," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"As the content of mercury in the product exceeded the acceptable level, its use may cause serious side effects. People who are using it should stop immediately and consult healthcare professionals as soon as possible if they feel unwell or are in doubt. Members of the public are urged not to buy or use cosmetic products of unknown composition or those obtained from doubtful sources," the spokesman added.

