

Hong Kong Customs urges public to stop using unsafe whitening cream (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs today (July 15) urged members of the public not to use a whitening cream product containing excessive mercury.

Customs earlier received from a relevant department a piece of information regarding a mercury poisoning case involving a patient using the whitening cream product. Test results revealed that the level of mercury in the product concerned was 16 471 parts per million. According to the relevant hygienic standard of the cosmetic, the mercury content of the whitening cream exceeded the maximum permitted limit by 16 471 times, in contravention of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (CGSO).

Having received the information, Customs yesterday (July 14) conducted an immediate enforcement action and seized 133 pieces of the whitening cream from the retailer concerned in Central. A 39-year-old woman-in-charge was arrested and is now being detained for further investigation.

A prohibition notice was served on the retailer concerned, prohibiting the continued sale of that model of whitening cream. Customs will arrange testing for the whitening cream.

Apart from the retailer in connection with the case, Customs officers also checked multiple retail spots in various districts and found no such product for sale 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 a change in the taste function. In severe cases, renal failure may occur.

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 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. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for

one year on first conviction, and \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years on a subsequent conviction.

Customs has been combating consistently 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 consumer goods may make a report via Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

