



## HSA SEIZES OVER 25,000 UNITS OF ILLEGAL HEALTH PRODUCTS SOLD ONLINE AS PART OF INTERNATIONAL ENFORCEMENT OPERATION

### *Four slimming products with banned substance among illegal health products seized*

As part of on-going global efforts to tackle the online sale of illegal health products, the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) participated for the sixth time in Operation PANGEA, an international Internet-based week of action involving some 100 countries and held from 18 to 25 June this year. During this week of intensified checks over the Internet online platforms to identify illegal health products being sold online in Singapore, 40 posts or sites were found to be non-compliant. Over 25,000 units of illegal health products, including slimming products, cosmetics products and medical devices, amounting to an estimated street value of close to \$10,000, were seized by HSA.

### **Illegal slimming products**

2 Among the illegal products detected by HSA during Operation PANGEA, four were illegal slimming products. Through HSA's laboratory testing, these products were found to contain sibutramine, which was not declared on the products' labels. Sibutramine is a potent medicinal ingredient for weight loss and had been suspended for sale in Singapore since October 2010<sup>1</sup>. Packaged as slimming drinks and popular with buyers online, the four products claimed to contain 100% natural ingredients and deliver fast results without side effects. They are:

- i) "VTOX Trim Up (威特尔健美奇)"
- ii) "BONJOUR"
- iii) "CURVY Pearl Beauty slimming orange juice"
- iv) "V12 Fruit Slimming"

Please refer to **Annex** for a photo of the illegal products.

3 HSA's investigations revealed that these four products had been sourced from overseas and placed for sale by local sellers via a variety of online platforms such as blogshops, forums and social media. Four individuals associated with these products are

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<sup>1</sup> Sibutramine was previously licensed as a prescription-only medicine for the treatment of obesity but its sale was suspended in Singapore in October 2010 following a benefit-risk assessment conducted by HSA in consultation with its Product Vigilance Advisory Committee and a panel of experts in metabolic diseases and cardiology. The increased risk of serious, non-fatal cardiovascular events, such as stroke or heart attack outweighed the modest weight loss achieved with sibutramine, which may not be maintained after stopping. Other adverse effects associated with sibutramine include hallucination, anxiety, dry mouth and constipation.

currently assisting HSA in investigations.

### **Advisory**

4 Due to the potential adverse effects of sibutramine found in the four slimming products, HSA advises consumers to stop the use of these products immediately and to consult their doctors if they feel unwell after taking these products or have other concerns about their health.

5 HSA reminds consumers to be careful when purchasing health products online. As seen from these four cases, health products innocently presented as beverages or drinks and claiming to be 100% natural can be potentially harmful. Consumers should exercise discretion when buying health products, especially those with exaggerated claims or which offer “quick-fix”. Consumption of poor quality and falsely labelled health products can cause serious health effects.

6 Members of the public who encounter illegal, counterfeit or other suspicious products may contact HSA’s Enforcement Branch at Tel: 6866 3485 during office hours (Monday to Friday) or email: [hsa\\_is@hsa.gov.sg](mailto:hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg). Additionally, members of the public are encouraged to visit [www.healthdangers.sg](http://www.healthdangers.sg) to learn more about the dangers of buying illegal health products from dubious sources.

7 HSA also warns sellers to stop the sales and distribution of these illegal products. Complementary health products (eg, slimming products) are not allowed to contain western medicinal ingredients or substances controlled under the Poisons Act or Health Products Act. Anyone found convicted of selling these illegal products will face a penalty fine of up to \$10,000 and/or imprisonment for a period of up to two years under the Poisons Act, and a penalty fine of up to \$100,000 and/or imprisonment for a period of up to three years under the Health Products Act.

8 Sellers should be cautious when sourcing for health products to sell and are reminded of their responsibility in ensuring the safety of the products and adherence to local legislations prior to introducing them to the market, including selling them online.

### **Operation Pangea VI**

9 To date, Operation Pangea is thus far the largest global Internet-based action of its kind aimed at addressing the online sale of illegal health products. It is co-ordinated by INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the Permanent Forum of International Pharmaceutical Crime (PFIPC), the Heads of Medicines Agencies Working Group of Enforcement Officers (HMA WGEO), the pharmaceutical industry and the electronic payments industry.

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY**  
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- **About the Health Sciences Authority (HSA)**

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) applies medical, pharmaceutical and scientific expertise through its three professional groups, Health Products Regulation, Blood Services and Applied Sciences, to protect and advance national health and safety. HSA is a multidisciplinary authority. It serves as the national regulator for health products, ensuring they are wisely regulated to meet standards of safety, quality and efficacy. As the national blood service, it is responsible for providing a safe and adequate blood supply. It also applies specialised scientific, forensic, investigative and analytical capabilities in serving the administration of justice. For more details, visit <http://www.hsa.gov.sg/>.

For more updates on public health and safety matters, follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/HSASg](http://www.twitter.com/HSASg).

- **About HSA's Health Products Regulation Group**

The Health Products Regulation Group (HPRG) of HSA ensures that drugs, innovative therapeutics, medical devices and health-related products are wisely regulated and meet appropriate safety, quality and efficacy standards. It contributes to the development of biomedical sciences in Singapore by administering a robust, scientific and responsive regulatory framework.

Photo of illegal products detected by HSA to contain undeclared sibutramine

