



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY  
PRESS RELEASE**

**29 SEPTEMBER 2011**

## **HSA JOINS 84 COUNTRIES IN CONCERTED OPERATION TARGETING ONLINE SUPPLY OF ILLEGAL MEDICINES**

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA), as part of its global collaboration activities, participated in Operation Pangea IV, an international Internet week of action targeting online sale of unregistered, counterfeit and illegal medicines to the public. HSA has taken part in all four operations to date. Held from 20 to 27 September, the operation focuses on websites supplying illegal and dangerous medicines and is the largest global Internet-based action of its kind in support of the International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce (IMPACT).

2. This operation 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.

### **Local Internet Surveillance Results**

3. During this concerted international Internet week of action to safeguard public health, HSA intensified its checks on suspicious local websites offering medicines and health products on top of its on-going Internet surveillance program. Regulatory actions were also taken against illegal online sales.

4. A total of 14 Internet platforms (ranging from discussion forums, web blogs, auction sites, online classified advertisements and company websites where medicines could be possibly offered for sale) were screened to see whether there was any contravention to Singapore's medicines' legislation. Of these, two sites were found to be selling illegal health products. \$13,560 worth of products was seized and seven individuals are currently under investigation for illegal sale of medicines which include lifestyle medicines such as those for weight-loss products and birth control pills. See [Annex A](#) for products seized.

5. Among the various medicines that are illegally sold over the Internet, the sale of birth control pills is a common feature that has been observed in Operation Pangea over the last three years. Birth control pills are prescription medicines that contain potent medicinal ingredients. Use of these products without appropriate medical supervision may pose potential health risk of blood clots and high blood pressure. In addition, as the quality of these products cannot be vouched for, buyers may be consuming ineffective medicines that do not work for the intended purpose.

6. This is clearly illustrated in two recent cases: two types of birth control pills seized from this year's Operation Pangea were found to be substandard. The two products were labelled to contain the hormones - Levonorgestrel and, Levonorgestrol and Quinestrol - respectively which act as contraceptives. However, HSA's analytical tests revealed that these two products were devoid of these hormones. HSA's investigations showed that online sellers usually buy the products from foreign countries and sell them for a profit.

### **Public Education Campaign**

7. Recognising the growing popularity of online shopping, including the purchase of health products like contact lenses and medicines online, HSA is rolling out a public education campaign to raise public awareness on the health dangers of buying such products online. The visuals will highlight the unseen dangers of seemingly innocuous online purchases. This campaign will leverage on multiple media channels such as print and radio, as well as popular social media platforms to help drive home the message. See Annex B for the campaign advertisement. Members of public are encouraged to visit [www.healthdangersonline.sg](http://www.healthdangersonline.sg) to learn more about the dangers of buying health products online.

### **Consumer Advisory**

8. With the Internet functioning as a global borderless medium that provides consumers easy access to health products, strong collaboration amongst international regulatory and enforcement agencies is required to combat these illegal online activities. Members of the public can also help to reduce such activities by purchasing health products only from reliable sources.

9. "There is no guarantee that the medicines purchased online are genuine or safe. It is difficult to verify the authenticity of any website, the supplier, or the medicines offered for sale over the Internet. You may be consuming products that contain the wrong active ingredient, wrong amounts of an active ingredient, or even no active ingredient, which can put your health or your life at risk," says Associate Professor Chan Cheng Leng<sup>1</sup>, Assistant Group Director, HSA.

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- **About the Health Sciences Authority (HSA)**

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is a multidisciplinary agency that applies medical, pharmaceutical and scientific expertise through its three professional groups, Health Products Regulation, Blood Services, Applied Sciences, to protect and advance national health and safety. It serves as the national regulator for health products, ensuring they are wisely regulated to meet standards of safety, quality and efficacy. It operates the national blood bank, Bloodbank@HSA, securing the nation's blood supply. It also applies specialised scientific, forensic, investigative and analytical capabilities in serving the administration of justice. For more details, visit [www.hsa.gov.sg](http://www.hsa.gov.sg).

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

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

- **About Operation Pangea**

Operation Pangea is an international collaboration targeting on the online sale of counterfeit and illegal medicines to raise public awareness of the associated health risks.

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, this is the 4<sup>th</sup> year where Operation Pangea is held.

The number of participants has grown from eight to 84 participating countries since its inception in 2008.

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### Products Seized on the Week of Operation Pangea IV



## HSA PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN ON DANGERS OF BUYING HEALTH PRODUCTS ONLINE

### Campaign Advertisement



SAVE THE MONEY,  
PAY THE PRICE.

**Wearing contact lenses bought from dubious websites can BLIND YOU.**

You may think that buying online can save you money, but the safety and quality of contact lenses bought from dubious websites cannot be ascertained. Contact lenses from such sites may be manufactured under unsafe or unsanitary conditions, and many are found to be defective or contaminated with micro-organisms which can cause blurred vision, severe eye infections and even blindness. Why risk your vision just to save a few dollars?

The consequences simply aren't worth it.



[www.healthdangersonline.sg](http://www.healthdangersonline.sg)

**THIS IS AN ADVISORY FROM THE HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY**  
Under the Health Products Act, it is an offence to sell or supply counterfeit or substandard contact lenses.

