



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE
31 JULY 2014

HSA ALERTS PUBLIC TO THREE ILLEGAL PRODUCTS PURCHASED FROM OVERSEAS WHICH CONTAIN UNDECLARED POTENT WESTERN MEDICINAL INGREDIENTS

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is alerting members of the public to three illegal health products purchased from overseas, used for the treatment of pain, that were detected to contain undeclared potent western medicinal ingredients. The three products are:

Product	Undeclared Western Medicinal Ingredients	Source of purchase
'JOINT-SOFT'	Piroxicam and Dexamethasone	Overseas purchase through a friend
'KEBIGUTAIJIAONANG 克痹骨泰胶囊'	Hydrochlorothiazide, Piroxicam and Prednisone	Overseas purchase through a family member
'Pil Raja Urat Asli'	Piroxicam and Indomethacin	Overseas retail shop

Please refer to **Annex A** for pictures of the products.

2 Three adverse reaction reports were received by HSA involving patients in their 50s-60s¹. One patient in his 60s, who had consumed 'JOINT-SOFT' for joint pain, experienced bleeding that led to his hospitalisation. Another patient in her 50s experienced weight gain and worsening of her diabetic condition after she consumed 'KEBIGUTAIJIAONANG' for joint pain. A third patient in her 60s gained over 8 kg after consuming 'Pil Raja Urat Asli' for relief of pain and for general well-being.

3 The products were bought overseas and are not known to be available locally. Such illegal health products from illegitimate or unknown sources are generally produced under poor manufacturing conditions with no quality control and the contents can vary significantly from batch to batch.

¹ Individuals may respond differently to the undeclared western medicinal ingredients and it is possible to experience adverse reactions other than those reported to HSA.

Undeclared western medicinal ingredients found in the illegal products

4 HSA's laboratory findings revealed the presence of potent steroids, dexamethasone and prednisone, in 'JOINT-SOFT' and 'KEBIGUTAIJIAONANG' respectively. These steroids are usually prescribed for inflammatory conditions and should only be used under strict medical supervision. Long term unsupervised use of oral steroids can cause increased blood glucose levels leading to diabetes, high blood pressure, cataracts, muscular and bone disorders, an increased risk of infections, and Cushing's syndrome (which is characterised by a round face or 'moon face' and upper body obesity with thin limbs).

5 Other than steroids, two potent painkillers, piroxicam and indomethacin, were detected in the products. These medicinal ingredients can potentially cause serious gastric bleeding, as well as cardiovascular events such as heart attack and stroke when used for a prolonged period. They should be used with close medical supervision, especially in patients with underlying heart conditions. Please refer to **Annex B** for more information on the potential adverse reactions that can be caused by these undeclared medicinal ingredients found in the products.

HSA advisory

6 Members of the public who are consuming these products are advised to:

- (i) Consult a doctor as soon as possible before stopping the products. Sudden discontinuation of steroids without proper medical supervision can cause serious withdrawal symptoms such as weakness, fatigue, confusion and low blood pressure, especially when these products have been taken for more than a few weeks. Undeclared western medicinal ingredients may cause possible adverse reactions as well as drug interactions with consumers' own medications which can seriously harm health.
- (ii) Be wary of complementary health products (e.g. traditional medicines, health supplements) which claim to provide unexpected rapid relief of pain symptoms associated with chronic conditions such as gout, arthritis and rheumatism. Complementary health products comprising natural ingredients are generally less potent than western medicines. Their effects are often not immediate and may only be seen after prolonged consumption. Consumers should exercise discretion in their purchase of these complementary health products, and obtain them from reliable and reputable sources locally.
- (iii) Seek appropriate medical treatment for acute and chronic medical symptoms and conditions (such as arthritis and rheumatism) and do not self-medicate.

7 HSA will take strong enforcement actions against those who engage in the sale and supply of health products containing undeclared potent medicinal ingredients. Anyone found to contravene the Poisons Act faces a penalty of up to \$10,000 and/or imprisonment for a period of up to two years.

8 Members of the public who have any information on the sale and supply of these three illegal products or other illegal products may contact HSA's Enforcement Branch at Tel: 6866-3485 during office hours (Monday to Friday) or email: hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg. Additionally, members of the public are encouraged to visit www.healthdangers.sg to learn more about the dangers of buying illegal health products from dubious sources.

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
SINGAPORE
31 JULY 2014**

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.

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.

HSA ALERTS PUBLIC TO THREE ILLEGAL PRODUCTS PURCHASED FROM OVERSEAS WHICH CONTAINED UNDECLARED POTENT WESTERN MEDICINAL INGREDIENTS



From left: 'JOINT-SOFT', 'KEBIGUTAIJIAONANG 克痹骨泰胶囊', 'Pil Raja Urat Asli'.

Information on the potent medicinal ingredients found in the illegal health products that should only be prescribed by a doctor

Prednisone and dexamethasone

Prednisone and dexamethasone are corticosteroids used for inflammatory conditions and should only be used under strict medical supervision. Long term unsupervised use of oral corticosteroids can cause increased blood glucose levels leading to diabetes, high blood pressure, cataracts, muscular and bone disorders, an increased risk of infections and Cushing's syndrome (which is characterised by a round face or 'moon face', and upper body obesity with thin limbs).

Hydrochlorothiazide

Hydrochlorothiazide is a potent diuretic drug that is used to eliminate water and salt from the body. Possible adverse reactions include muscle weakness, dizziness, cramps, vomiting and diarrhoea. Excessive 'water-eliminating' effect of hydrochlorothiazide can cause the depletion of sodium, chloride, body water and other minerals in the body.

Piroxicam and indomethacin

Piroxicam and indomethacin are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) used to treat pain and inflammation in the body. They can cause gastrointestinal adverse reactions such as nausea, vomiting and gastric bleeding. NSAIDs may also be associated with cardiovascular events (e.g. heart attack and stroke), especially when used at high doses over long duration. Patients being treated with NSAIDs should be periodically reviewed by a doctor.

An advisory on NSAIDs and cardiovascular risk can be found at the following link: http://www.hsa.gov.sg/content/hsa/en/Health_Products_Regulation/Safety_Information_and_Product_Recalls/Product_Safety_Alerts/2007/Non-selective_NSAIDs_.html