



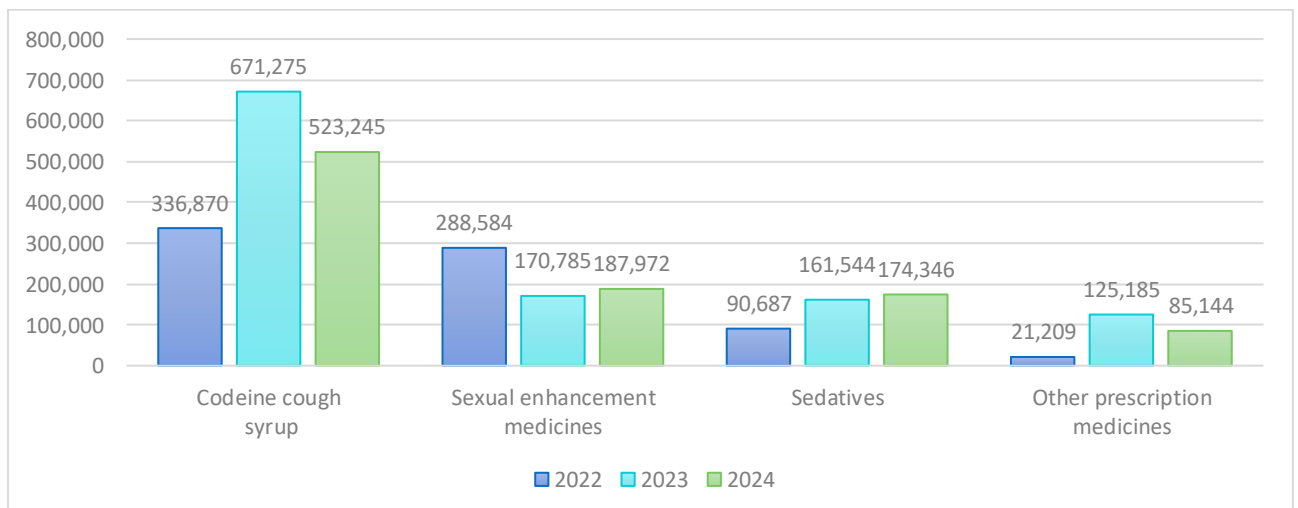
**HSA SEIZED OVER 970,000 UNITS OF ILLEGAL HEALTH PRODUCTS AND REMOVED MORE THAN 7,000 ILLEGAL PRODUCT LISTINGS IN 2024**

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) has continued to step up ground and online surveillance efforts to curb the sale and supply of illegal health products in the past year. Coordinated efforts involving targeted operations, intelligence sharing, and joint enforcement with both local and overseas agencies led to the seizure of 970,707 units of illegal health products and the removal of 7,351 listings from local e-commerce and social media platforms. This multi-pronged approach has disrupted the supply of illegal health products and protected the public from potential harm posed by these products.

**Proactive ground operations at hotspots**

2 Codeine cough syrup made up the majority (54%) of illegal products seized, followed by sexual enhancement medicines (19%), sedatives (18%), and other prescription medicines (9%) (Figure 2.1). 64 persons were investigated for illegal supply of health products. These cases are undergoing investigation.

**Figure 2.1: Types of illegal health products seized from 2022 to 2024**



3 One of the notable seizures took place in May 2024, when HSA and the Singapore Police Force (SPF) mounted an operation against the illegal manufacture and supply of cough syrups in a condominium unit in Geylang<sup>1</sup>. The cough syrups were manufactured in unsanitary conditions in different parts of the unit, including the bathroom and kitchen sink. Approximately 165 litres of cough syrups and more than 57,000 units of assorted medicines with a street value of \$130,000 were seized. All seized products were meant for illegal supply in Geylang.

### **7,351 product listings removed from local e-commerce and social media platforms**

4 In 2024, HSA worked with the administrators of local e-commerce and social media platforms to take down 7,351 listings of illegal health products. Almost half of the number of listings taken down were a result of HSA's first large-scale collaboration<sup>2</sup> with local online platform administrators in September and October 2024 that targeted illegal online sales and sellers. This operation built on the close collaboration that HSA has established with Amazon Singapore, Carousell, eBay Singapore, Facebook, Lazada, Qoo10, Shopee and TikTok. HSA also issued warnings to 2,868 online sellers in 2024.

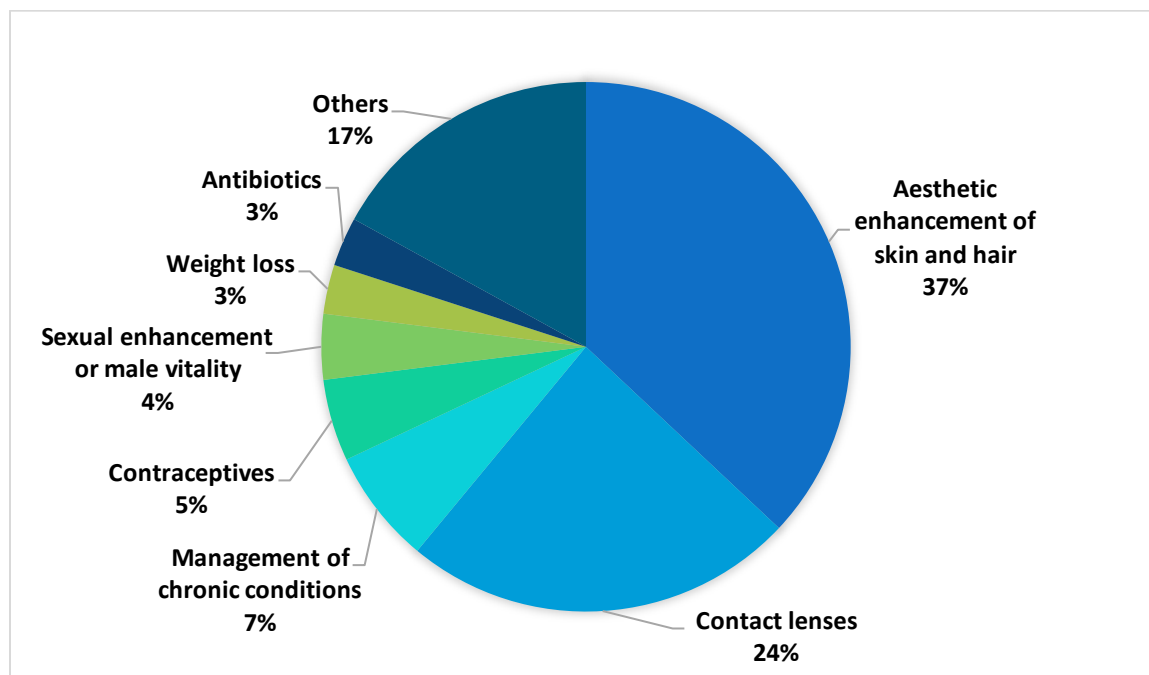
5 The majority of listings removed (37%) were products marketing aesthetic enhancement of skin and hair including dermal fillers, Botulinum toxin, skin whitening, acne treatment and hair loss treatment products. 24% were for contact lenses, 7% were for the management of chronic conditions such as cholesterol, hypertension, allergies and pain relief, 5% were contraceptives, 4% were sexual enhancement or male vitality products, 3% were weight loss products and 3% were antibiotics. Other listings detected in small numbers included eye drops, nasal sprays, antihistamines, test kits and other prescription medicines (Figure 5.1). The listings were posted mainly on Shopee (52%) and Lazada (36%). Other affected listings were detected on Carousell (4%) and Qoo10 (4%).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hsa.gov.sg/announcements/press-release/hsa-and-police-raid-condo-unit-suspected-to-be-used-for-manufacture-of-cough-syrup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hsa.gov.sg/announcements/press-release/hsa-removes-over-3-000-online-listings-of-illegal-health-products-in-first-joint-operation-with-online-platforms>

Figure 5.1: Types of products detected and removed from local e-commerce and social media platforms in 2024



6 HSA and platform administrators have continued to work together to strengthen the surveillance systems to stop potentially offending product listings from being posted.

### **Prosecution actions against the sale and supply of illegal health products**

7 In 2024, HSA prosecuted 30 persons for the sale and supply of illegal health products. Some notable cases were as follows:

- In January 2024, Rasel Md, 33, was caught for the illegal possession of cough syrups, sedatives and opioids, with the intention to sell them in Geylang. Investigations revealed that he was recruited by a syndicate to peddle the illegal products for a daily pay of \$100. During the course of investigations, he re-offended twice. He was prosecuted and sentenced to 31 weeks' imprisonment.
- In September 2024, Peh Zhisheng Gabriel, 33, was fined \$266,500 for importing counterfeit cosmetics and selling them on local e-commerce platforms. The case was uncovered in July 2023, when the Intellectual Property Rights Branch of SPF raided an apartment unit and seized 126 types of branded cosmetic products which were later confirmed to be counterfeits.

HSA's investigations revealed that Peh had sourced the counterfeit cosmetics from China-based suppliers and imported them to Singapore without verifying their authenticity or safety. He listed the counterfeit products through multiple accounts on Lazada and Shopee. Even after receiving several warnings from the platform administrators about the suspected counterfeit products and having his accounts banned, he persisted to sell the products by using his family members' particulars to create new accounts and earned about \$10,000 monthly.

8 HSA will take stern enforcement actions against anyone who sells or supplies illegal health products. Sellers and suppliers who are selling such products are liable to be prosecuted and if convicted, may be imprisoned for up to 3 years and/or fined up to \$100,000.

### **Illegal health products found to contain potent ingredients and/or banned substances**

9 In 2024, HSA issued public alerts on 14 illegal health products, which included a counterfeit probiotic health supplement. These cases were detected through adverse event reporting from healthcare professionals, regular surveillance, and feedback from consumers. Thirteen persons reported adverse effects experienced by themselves and/or their family members.

10 Thirteen of these products were found to contain potent ingredients and/or banned substances, while the counterfeit probiotic health supplement did not contain the purported probiotic strain. The most common adulterants detected were sibutramine (a banned substance since 2010) and potent steroids such as dexamethasone and betamethasone valerate. Sibutramine was detected in five products marketed for weight loss, while potent steroids were found in seven products marketed for pain relief, eczema relief, skin whitening and general wellbeing. Please refer to the Annex for the list of these illegal health products, their associated health or lifestyle claims, where they were purchased, information on the potent ingredients and/or banned substances they contain, and photos of these products.

*Three consumers hospitalised due to serious adverse effects from illegal products*

11 A man in his 50s had been taking “Sausando Cellulite Pills”<sup>3</sup> for five months and was hospitalised after he experienced seizures (fits), hyponatraemia (low level of sodium in blood) and vomiting. The product was marketed as a “natural health food” weight loss product with exaggerated claims such as “lose weight fast in 7 days” but was found to contain the banned substance sibutramine, a laxative and a diuretic.

12 A woman in her 30s was hospitalised after using “88 Total White Underarm Cream”<sup>3</sup> which was touted to whiten and smoothen the skin. After a month of use, she developed a severe rash over her body and liver impairment with raised liver enzymes and jaundice. Due to the exposure to a high level of mercury, she was diagnosed with allergic contact dermatitis and drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms (also known as DRESS syndrome), a severe hypersensitivity reaction characterised by skin rash, blood abnormalities and injury to the liver and/or kidney, which can be life-threatening.

13 After taking “ayukalp Mahayograj Guggulu”<sup>4</sup> for about one and a half months for back pain, a woman in her 30s started experiencing fatigue, chest discomfort, and shortness of breath during physical activity. The product was tested by HSA to contain lead at a level exceeding 6,000 times the permissible limit for traditional medicines. Exposure to high levels of lead may cause abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, anaemia, liver inflammation and brain injury. Over the long term, it may also cause toxic effects to the kidneys, digestive and nervous systems. Adjunct Assistant Professor Pankaj Handa, Senior Consultant from the Department of General Medicine from Tan Tock Seng Hospital, who treated the woman, advised, “Traditional health products may contain unintended substances in the amounts that can cause toxicity and damage to health. Patients are strongly advised to seek help from a healthcare professional, a pharmacist or physician, before consuming any such preparation.”

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hsa.gov.sg/announcements/press-release/hsa-alert-three-products-found-with-banned-or-potent-ingredients>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hsa.gov.sg/announcements/press-release/hsa-alert-ayukalp-mahayograj-guggulu-counterfeit-lactogg>

*Young children experienced unexpected or adverse effects associated with illegal health products*

14 HSA was alerted by a member of the public to “Special Skin Treatment”<sup>5</sup> after she noticed unexpectedly quick and significant improvement in her children’s eczema within 5 days of using the product. The skin cream was sold on the now inactive “touchskin.com.sg” website and marketed to relieve skin conditions such as eczema. It claimed to contain natural ingredients and not steroids, and to be safe for babies, young children, pregnant women, and anyone with sensitive skin. However, HSA tested it to contain clobetasol propionate, a potent steroid. Creams containing such potent steroids for treatment of skin conditions should only be prescribed by doctors for use under medical supervision.

15 A consumer in his 40s alerted HSA to counterfeit “LACTOGG”<sup>6</sup> capsules when he and his family members experienced adverse effects after taking the product. He and his wife experienced abdominal discomfort, vomiting and diarrhoea while their 2-year-old child developed high fever and had abnormal-coloured faeces. HSA’s analysis revealed that the capsules did not contain the probiotic strain that was listed on the packaging. The capsules were verified by the company to be counterfeit. The product packaging was also observed to have poor quality printing. The consumer had purchased it on Shopee from a seller who was selling these capsules at a much lower price compared to the genuine product sold in healthcare institutions, clinics, pharmacies and established retailers.

### **Consumer advisory**

16 Associate Professor Chan Cheng Leng, Group Director of HSA’s Health Products Regulation Group, emphasises, “Health products that have previously been detected to contain harmful ingredients may resurface for sale under different packaging to evade detection by the Authority. Consumers need to be aware that

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hsa.gov.sg/announcements/press-release/hsa-alert--three-products-found-with-potent-medicinal-ingredients>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hsa.gov.sg/announcements/press-release/hsa-alert-ayukalp-mahayograj-guggulu-counterfeit-lactogg>

illegal health products often masquerade as quick fixes and miracle cures. In reality, they may be ticking time bombs as they can harm your health. While HSA will continue to maintain its surveillance and enforcement to curb the sale and supply of illegal health products, consumers need to be careful and discerning when purchasing health products.”

17 Consumers are advised to follow the steps below to stay A-L-E-R-T to protect their health.

**Stay A-L-E-R-T**  
to protect your own health

**A** **VOID** Dubious Products: Steer clear of products from unknown or unverified sources, especially online. You cannot be certain where and how these products were made and whether they have been adulterated with harmful ingredients.

**L** **OOK** for Reputable Sellers: Only purchase from trusted pharmacies or well-known retailers with an established presence in Singapore.

**E** **XAMINE** Claims: Be cautious and wary of products that claim to have miraculous results or “no side effects”.

**R** **EPORT** Suspicious Products: Help protect others by reporting dangerous or dubious products to HSA.

**T** **RUST** Medical Advice: Seek advice from a healthcare professional and avoid self-medicating with unknown products.

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**A**VOID Dubious Products: Steer clear of products from unknown or unverified sources, especially online. You cannot be certain where and how these products were made and whether they have been adulterated with harmful ingredients.

**L**OOK for Reputable Sellers: Only purchase from trusted pharmacies or well-known retailers with an established retail presence in Singapore.

**EXAMINE Claims:** Be cautious and wary of products that claim to have miraculous results or “no side effects”.

**REPORT Suspicious Products:** Help protect others by reporting dangerous or dubious products to HSA.

**TRUST Medical Advice:** Seek advice from a healthcare professional and avoid self-medicating with unknown products.

18 Members of the public who have any information on the sale and supply of these illegal health 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).

## **HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY**

### **SINGAPORE**

**3 FEBRUARY 2025**

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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 [www.hsa.gov.sg/](http://www.hsa.gov.sg/).

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

#### **About HSA’s Health Products Regulation Group**

The Health Products Regulation Group (HPRG) of HSA ensures that medicines, 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 SEIZED OVER 970,000 UNITS OF ILLEGAL HEALTH PRODUCTS AND REMOVED MORE THAN 7,000 ILLEGAL PRODUCT LISTINGS IN 2024**

**List of 14 illegal or counterfeit health products detected by HSA**

<b>Product type</b>	<b>Product name</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Potent ingredients or banned substances detected / Issue</b>
Weight loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Nature Slim”</li> <li>• “Slimming Seven Days by Figure Up”</li> <li>• “Energy Booster Figure-Up New Look Strong Version”</li> </ul>	Shopee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sibutramine (banned substance)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Sausando Cellulite Pills” “消脂丸 ダイエットマル”</li> </ul>	Shopee and Lazada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sibutramine (banned medicinal substance)</li> <li>• Phenolphthalein (laxative)</li> <li>• Frusemide (diuretic)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Pelangsing Double Strong”</li> </ul>	Shopee and Lazada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sibutramine (banned medicinal substance)</li> <li>• N-desmethysibutramine (a chemical similar to sibutramine)</li> <li>• Diclofenac (painkiller)</li> </ul>
Pain relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “骨節靈” (“Gu Jie Ling”)</li> </ul>	“Traditional medicine shop” in Johor Bahru, Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dexamethasone (steroid)</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cetirizine (antihistamine)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “辣木草药丸” (“La Mu Cao Capsules”)</li> </ul>	Purchased through a friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prednisolone (steroid)</li> <li>• Amoxicillin (antibiotic)</li> <li>• Diclofenac (anti-inflammatory painkiller)</li> <li>• Paracetamol (painkiller)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “ayukalp Mahayograj Guggulu”</li> </ul>	Union Yoga Ayurveda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead (toxic heavy metal) exceeding the permissible limit for traditional medicines by 6,000 times</li> </ul>
Eczema relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Special Skin Treatment”</li> </ul>	Product website “touchskin.com.sg” (now inactive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clobetasol propionate (steroid)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Touch Skin by DermaCare Skin Relief Treatment Cream”</li> </ul>	Retail shop in Orchard Road and direct from the seller via WhatsApp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Betamethasone valerate (potent steroid)</li> </ul>
Skin whitening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “88 Total White Underarm Cream”</li> </ul>	Retail shop at Lucky Plaza and local e-commerce platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mercury (toxic heavy metal)</li> <li>• Betamethasone valerate (potent steroid)</li> <li>• Salicylic Acid (anti-acne and exfoliating agent)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Q-Nic Care Whitening Underarm Cream”</li> </ul>	Retail shop at Lucky Plaza and local e-commerce platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mercury (toxic heavy metal)</li> <li>• Betamethasone valerate (potent steroid)</li> <li>• Triclosan (preservative not allowed in cosmetic skin creams)</li> </ul>
General wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “纯天然草药” (“Natural Herbs”)</li> </ul>	Purchased through a relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dexamethasone (steroid)</li> </ul>
Counterfeit probiotic supplement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “LACTOGG” capsules</li> </ul>	Shopee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counterfeit product did not contain the probiotic strain Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG, which was listed on the packaging.</li> </ul>

## **Possible adverse effects of potent ingredients and/or banned substances found in the products**

### **Amoxicillin**

Amoxicillin is an antibiotic prescribed to treat bacterial infections. Inappropriate use of antibiotics without medical supervision can lead to its decreased effectiveness. Other possible adverse effects include diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, serious hypersensitivity reactions and rash.

### **Betamethasone valerate, clobetasol propionate, dexamethasone, prednisolone**

These are potent steroids that are usually prescribed for inflammatory conditions and should only be used under strict medical supervision. Long-term unsupervised use of steroids (including topical use where the steroid can be absorbed into the body) can cause increased blood glucose levels (which may lead to diabetes), high blood pressure, cataracts, muscular and bone disorders (including osteoporosis), an increased risk of infections and Cushing's syndrome (characterised by a round face or 'moon face' appearance and upper body obesity with thin limbs). Sudden discontinuation of steroids without proper medical supervision can lead to adrenal insufficiency, a serious condition where the body does not produce adequate amounts of steroid hormones, resulting in fatigue, generalised weakness, muscle and joint pain, low blood pressure, fits or shock.

### **Cetirizine**

Cetirizine is an antihistamine used to relieve allergic reactions and should be used under medical supervision. Adverse effects from the use of cetirizine include drowsiness, fatigue, headache and dry mouth.

### **Diclofenac**

Diclofenac is a potent painkiller that may potentially cause serious gastric bleeding, as well as cardiovascular events such as heart attacks and stroke when used for a prolonged period. Diclofenac should be used under close medical supervision, especially in consumers with underlying heart conditions.

**Frusemide**

Frusemide is a diuretic (medicine used to eliminate water and salt from the body) and is a prescription only medicine that should be used under medical supervision. The side effects associated with its use include loss of appetite and low blood pressure. When taken in excess, the 'water-eliminating' effect of frusemide can cause the depletion of sodium, chloride, body water and other minerals in the body.

**Lead**

Lead is a toxic heavy metal and acute exposure to high levels may cause abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, anaemia, hepatitis (inflammation of the liver) and brain injury. Long-term exposure to very high levels of lead may also cause toxic effects to the body, including the kidneys, digestive and nervous systems.

**Mercury**

Mercury is a toxic heavy metal and is prohibited for use as an ingredient in cosmetic products. It may cause rashes, skin irritation and blotchiness, and can be absorbed through the skin causing numbness, dizziness and headaches. Long term use of mercury containing products can also cause toxic effects to the kidneys, digestive and nervous systems, leading to organ damage.

**Paracetamol**

Paracetamol is available over the counter for the relief of fever and pain. Rare adverse effects include hypersensitivity reactions such as rash.

**Phenolphthalein**

Phenolphthalein was used as a laxative in the past but has not been registered in Singapore since 2011. Phenolphthalein may cause kidney disorders and has been found in animal studies to be associated with cancer. It may also cause breathing difficulties, rashes and abdominal cramps. It is an obsolete pharmaceutical compound that has been superseded by newer laxatives.

**Salicylic acid**

Salicylic acid is used to treat common skin conditions such as acne, psoriasis and dandruff. The use of products with high levels of salicylic acid could lead to dry, irritated, and red skin.

**Sibutramine, N-desmethylsibutramine**

Sibutramine was a prescription-only weight loss medicine that has been banned in Singapore since 2010 due to an increased risk of heart attack and stroke. Other serious health consequences include heart problems and central nervous system disorders (e.g., psychosis and hallucinations). In 2019, a consumer experienced extremely fast heart rate and became unconscious after taking an illegal product which contained sibutramine. She was resuscitated and suffered debilitating consequences requiring the implantation of a defibrillator (a medical device) to help her heart to function. N-desmethylsibutramine is an analogue (a chemically-related compound) of sibutramine.

**Triclosan**

Triclosan is a preservative that is not allowed in cosmetic skin creams.

## Photos of the illegal products tested by HSA

“88 Total White Underarm Cream”



“ayukalp Mahayograj Guggulu”

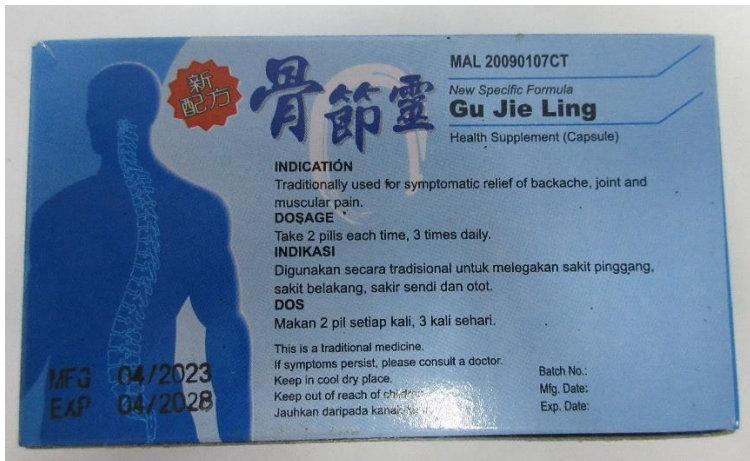




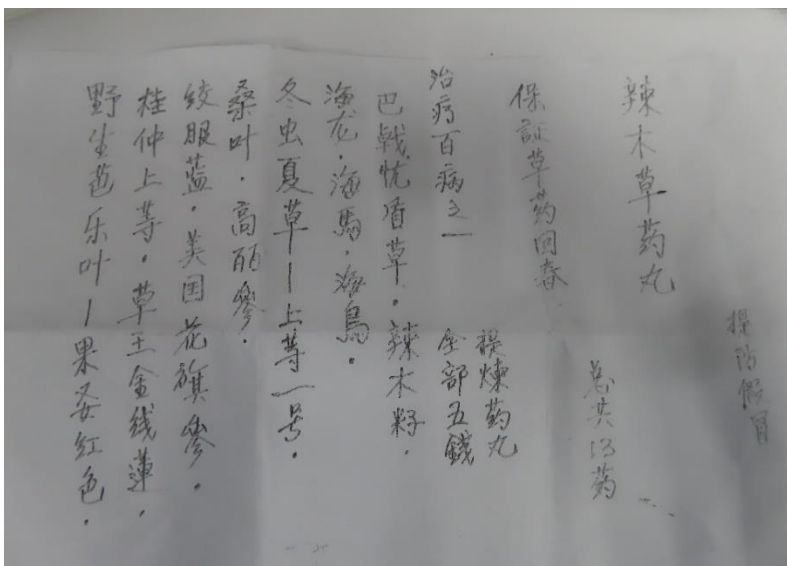
“Energy Booster Figure Up New Look Strong Version”



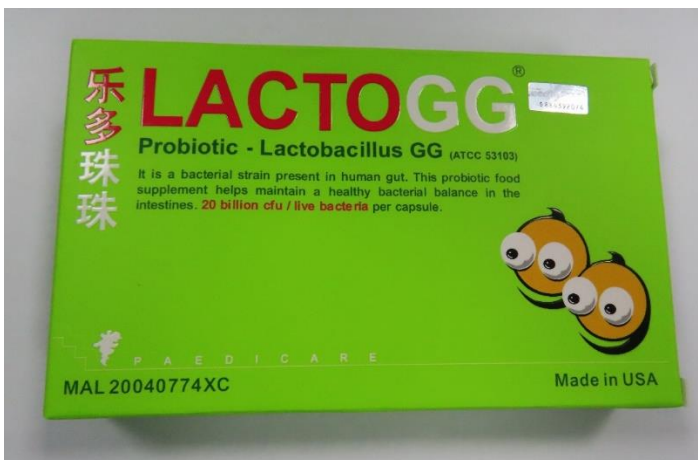
“骨節靈 (Gu Jie Ling)”



“辣木草药丸” (“La Mu Cao Capsules”)



Counterfeit “LACTOGG” capsules



“纯天然草药 Natural Herbs”



“Nature Slim”





## “Pelangsing Double Strong”



## “Q-nic Care Whitening Underarm Cream”



“Sausando Cellulite Pills” 消脂丸 ダイエットマル



“Slimming Seven Days by Figure Up”



“Special Skin Treatment”



“Touch Skin by DermaCare Skin Relief Treatment Cream”

