



HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE
25 OCTOBER 2024

HSA ALERT: “Q-NIC CARE WHITENING UNDERARM CREAM” DETECTED TO CONTAIN VERY HIGH LEVELS OF MERCURY AND A POTENT STEROID

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is alerting members of the public not to purchase or use “Q-nic Care Whitening Underarm Cream”. The cream was touted to help reduce body odour, whiten and smoothen skin tone and claimed to be “safe, natural, non-toxic and harmless to your skin”. However, HSA’s test revealed that the cream contained potent ingredients, including very high levels of mercury, a potent steroid (betamethasone valerate) and a preservative (triclosan) that is not allowed in cosmetic skin creams. Please refer to **Annex A** for photos of the product.

2 A consumer who purchased “Q-nic Care Whitening Underarm Cream” online experienced immediate and effective results which made her suspect that the product contained potent ingredients. She reported the product to HSA. HSA’s investigations revealed that “Q-nic Care Whitening Underarm Cream” was sold on local e-commerce platforms such as Carousell, Shopee and Lazada and a retail shop (Beauty & Bath) at Lucky Plaza. HSA has worked with the local platform administrators to remove the affected listings and also seized all the products from the Lucky Plaza shop. Two sellers are assisting with investigations.

Harmful effects of product

3 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.

4 Betamethasone valerate is a potent steroid usually prescribed for inflammatory conditions and should only be used under medical supervision. Long-term unsupervised use of steroid-containing creams can cause hypersensitivity reactions, thinning of the skin and steroid withdrawal syndrome (burning, itching and redness following sudden stopping of prolonged use). They may also be absorbed into the body and cause serious adverse effects such as high blood pressure, cataracts, muscular and bone disorders, an increased risk of infections and Cushing's syndrome (a round face or 'moon face' appearance and upper body obesity with thin limbs). Triclosan is a preservative with anti-bacterial properties which may cause skin irritation.

Advisory to consumers

5 Consumers are strongly encouraged to:

- **See a doctor as soon as possible** if you are using "Q-nic Care Whitening Underarm Cream" as it contains a very high level of mercury and a potent steroid, which can cause serious harm to your health. Sudden stopping of steroid-containing creams without medical supervision may also worsen underlying skin conditions or cause topical steroid withdrawal symptoms such as burning, redness, itching or peeling of skin.
- **Be wary of products that promise miraculous effects or make exaggerated claims** such as being "harmless", "100% safe" or "no side effects". Such products may contain potent ingredients that can seriously harm your health.
- **Exercise caution when buying products from dubious, unfamiliar or online sources**, as you cannot be certain where and how these products were made and whether they have been adulterated with harmful ingredients. Adulterated products are often manufactured under poor conditions with no quality control, and different batches of the same product may contain variable amounts of ingredients and/or different types of adulterants.
- **Buy only from reputable pharmacies or retailers' websites, or those with an established retail presence in Singapore**, when buying health products online.

Advisory to sellers and suppliers

6 All sellers and suppliers must stop selling these products immediately. HSA will not hesitate to take stern enforcement actions against anyone who sells and supplies products found to be adulterated with potent ingredients. Sellers and suppliers are liable to prosecution and if convicted, may be imprisoned for up to 2 years and/or fined up to \$50,000.

7 Members of the public who have any information on the sale and supply of these 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.

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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 at 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.

ANNEX A

**HSA ALERT: “Q-NIC CARE WHITENING UNDERARM CREAM”
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Photos of “Q-Nic Care Whitening Underarm Cream” tested by HSA

