

'Danger in illegal medical products'

Health experts warn that unregistered products can cause harm and even death

By RAHIMY RAHIM
rahimyr@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Consumers are urged to avoid unregistered medical products, which may not work and could cause harmful effects, especially those sold online, say health experts.

Public healthcare specialist Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia said the use of unregistered medical products or the intake of such products can be dangerous, and sometimes result in adverse reactions and even patient mortality.

"In general, some of these products may not be of medicinal quality at all as they might not be medically tested for safety, toxicology and efficiency.

"Not only do the products not

work or they might not work well, but could also pose adverse effects to consumers," she said.

She was asked to comment on a report that the Health Ministry seized over one million unregistered medical devices worth RM1.67mil nationwide between 2023 and 2025.

According to the Health Ministry, from 2023 to 2025, a total of 4,035 raids involving health products were carried out following public complaints, intelligence gathering, and targeted monitoring at physical premises and online sales platforms.

"As a result, 43,122 unregistered health products were seized.

She warned that unregistered health products may contain heavy metals, contaminants,

pathogens and chemicals that can cause organ damage.

"The public is highly encouraged to obtain medical products through licensed providers or verified pharmacists," she said.

She also warned that if prices go up due to the Middle East conflict, consumers may turn to unregistered medical products for easier and less costly treatments.

"Consumers need to exercise caution, and providers should also be mindful not to set prices excessively high," she said.

Malaysian Pharmacists Society president Amrahi Buang applauded the enforcement efforts of the Medical Device Authority (MDA) that resulted in the massive seizure.

In their recent meeting with MDA, the society raised concerns

about the widespread sale of counterfeit and unregistered medical devices, such as blood pressure monitors, both online and in physical marketplaces, particularly on e-commerce platforms.

"Blood pressure monitors, as medical devices, require proper registration and regulatory oversight. Inaccurate or non-validated devices can lead to incorrect readings and inappropriate health decisions, posing serious patient safety risks," he said.

The current market includes unregistered devices and suspected counterfeit products, especially online, where the seller's identity, licensing status and product validity may be unclear, he said.

"Reports from pharmacists indicate that inaccurate home readings have led to poor blood

pressure control, highlighting that this is not just a regulatory issue but a critical patient safety concern," he said.

Public Health Medicine Specialist Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said the Health Ministry is indeed making a tangible impact, though the battle is far from over.

"They are aggressively clearing the market of physical hazards while trying to get ahead of digital and emerging threats.

"Malaysia needs to move beyond raids toward a more integrated approach. While monitoring ads is good, we need to make e-commerce sites legally responsible.

"Mandate platforms to verify and display MDA registration numbers prominently on all listings," he said.

1.3 million unregistered medical devices seized

PETALING JAYA: More than a million unregistered medical devices worth RM1.68mil were seized nationwide by the Health Ministry between 2023 and 2025.

The Health Ministry said that through medical device enforcement activities, 15 raids were conducted over that period.

"During this period, 1,315,758 units of medical devices were seized, with total seizures valued at RM1,675,713.55.

"However, the Medical Device Authority (MDA) does not conduct house-to-house inspections as this falls outside its jurisdiction," the ministry stated in a parliamentary written reply to Senator Norhasmimi Abdul Ghani at the Dewan Negara.

She had asked the ministry to outline measures to protect senior citizens and chronically ill patients from being targeted by

scams involving medical devices and health products, including aggressive sales through door-to-door demonstrations and online platforms.

The ministry said 4,035 raids were carried out following public complaints, intelligence gathering and targeted monitoring at physical premises and online sales platforms, resulting in 43,122 unregistered health products seized.

"Monitoring and screening of medicine advertisements were also conducted across all media platforms.

"For new media, advertisement screening was carried out continuously across websites, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X and YouTube, as well as e-commerce platforms such as Shopee and Lazada," the ministry added.

For health product advertise-

ments found to have violated the relevant acts or regulations, enforcement action was taken, including content restriction or removal.

"A total of 52,618 URL links have been blocked or removed from e-commerce platforms. Also, warning letters, investigations and prosecutions have been carried out against offenders.

"In 2025, 4,058 advertisements were monitored and 3,084 links advertising unregistered medical devices taken down, along with 21 takedown notices issued to the parties involved," it said.

The ministry and e-commerce platform operators have also forged cooperation to curb the widespread advertising and distribution of unregistered health products and medical devices.

"We do not encourage the purchase of health products and

medical devices through e-commerce platforms, as they carry risks such as counterfeit or unregistered products, as well as sellers with no verified identity making questionable health claims.

"Legal action will be taken against any company or individual selling, distributing or marketing unregistered medical devices, including fines, product recalls and prosecution under Act 737.

"Any individual who violates Section 5(1) of the Medical Device Act 2012 (Act 737) by placing unregistered medical devices in the market may face a fine of up to RM200,000, jail of up to three years or both," it said.

For the sale of unregistered health products, this constitutes a violation of Regulation 7(1)(a) of the Control of Drugs and Cosmetics Regulations 1984, an offence under Regulation 30(1)

and punishable under Section 12(1) of the Sale of Drugs Act 1952.

For the first offence, a person may be fined up to RM25,000, jailed up to three years or both. For repeat offences, the penalty may be a fine of up to RM50,000, jail of up to five years or both.

A campaign called "Tolak Ubat Tidak Sah", or "TOBaTS", was launched in 2024 to combat the supply and sale of illegal pharmaceutical products.

Details on the campaign can be found at <https://pharmacy.moh.gov.my/tobats>

Other initiatives such as the Know Your Medicine Programme, Home Medication Review and Medication Therapy Adherence Clinic aim to grow understanding of diseases and medications, and empower them to make informed decisions and avoid falling victim to health product scams.

NUTRITIOUS DISHES

TIPS FOR HEALTHIER RAMADAN BAZAAR MEALS

Nutritionists, content creators share healthier food picks for iftar

HUSNINA NABIHAH
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

NUTRITIONISTS and content creators are harnessing the power of social media to get Malaysians, especially those who visit Ramadan bazaars, to eat healthily.

TikTok user @crystalnutritionist has posted three episodes of a series titled, "How to Eat Healthy at the Ramadan Bazaar".

She visits stalls and selects food based on balanced nutrition. In the first episode, she chose *nasi kerabu* as her meal.

She said *nasi kerabu* was a balanced dish

because it contained vegetables and protein.

"*Nasi kerabu* is good because it has a lot of vegetables. Vegetables are good for digestion, especially after fasting, when you may worry about constipation."

For protein, she selected grilled chicken breast as it contained less fat compared with fried chicken. She also chose a coconut drink without added sugar.

In the second episode, she chose *asam laksa*.

"*Asam laksa* is very good because it is less oily. The soup is not like curry, which contains lot of coconut milk. It is very clean."

She also selected fish for higher protein.

In the third episode, she picked *ayam golek*.

She said it was a healthy option as it was roasted without oil and suitable for those trying to lose weight.

She also bought unsweetened soy milk and a Vietnamese roll, which she described as a good source of fibre.

Another TikTok user, @jasmine.pharmacist, shared her healthy picks.

"I bought *taufufa* because the sugar is separate, so later you can control how much sugar to add in. It is not too sweet."

She also bought fresh pineapple, a fresh coconut drink, grilled *otak-otak* and *bakso bihun*.

"*Bakso bihun* is good as the soup is clear, not salty and not oily, and it has meatballs for protein."

Nutritionists also gave advice on the TikTok account @nutritionist.kkm.

Zaiza from the Health Ministry's Nutrition Division said: "Prioritise buying meals with vegetables, such as *kerabu pecal* or mixed vegetable soup."

"Fibre in vegetables helps control appetite, stabilise blood sugar after breaking fast and reduce the desire to take too much sweet food."

To lose weight during Ramadan, nutritionist NurSyukrina Muhamad Norrahim said: "Make sure you control calorie intake by choosing low-calorie dishes."

Are microwaveable plastic containers safe?

MICROWAVEABLE plastic takeaway containers can be found everywhere, from restaurants to homes, to store and reheat food.

It's affordable, practical and convenient. But is it safe? According to a new Greenpeace International analysis of peer-reviewed science, it's a potential cancer risk.

The report, 'Are We Cooked? The Hidden Health Risks of Plastic-Packaged Ready Meals', reviewed 24 recent scientific studies and found that convenience food items marketed as "safe-to heat" are, in fact, potentially exposing millions of people to invisible contaminants every day. Using these plastic containers in the microwave is said to release hundreds of thousands of micro and nanoplastics in minutes, exposing unsuspecting consumers to microplastics and hazardous chemicals that should never be in or near our food.

According to the report, more than 4,200 hazardous chemicals are known to be used in or present in plastics. Some, like bisphenols, phthalates, PFAS (forever chemicals) and even toxic metals such as antimony, are linked to cancer, infertility, hormone disruption and metabolic disease.

DISTINGUISHING FACT FROM FICTION

While there is enough evidence indicating that heating food in plastic containers can cause the migration of

Microwave-safe plastic containers are considered safe as they are tested and chemical migration remains below safety limits under ordinary use, says OncoCare Malaysia consultant clinical oncologist Dr Matin Mellor Abdullah.

PICTURE CREDIT: ONCCOCARE MALAYSIA



numerous substances or chemicals, such as microplastic and nanoplastics into food, the amount relates to the duration of heating, heating temperature and the integrity of the plastic food containers, says OncoCare Malaysia consultant clinical oncologist Dr Matin Mellor Abdullah.

"Longer heating at higher temperatures with degraded plastic containers releases more substances into heated food. Microwave-safe containers are considered safe as they are tested and chemical migration remains below safety limits under ordinary use."

As for the link between these hazardous chemicals and human health, Dr Matin says it remains under investigation.

"While there have been reports of cancer developing in animals in experiments, there is currently no definitive evidence of a direct link to cancer in humans."

Dr Matin says while reheating in glass and ceramic containers is certainly safer, one does need to be practical too. Microwaveable plastic containers are light and easy to carry compared with glass.

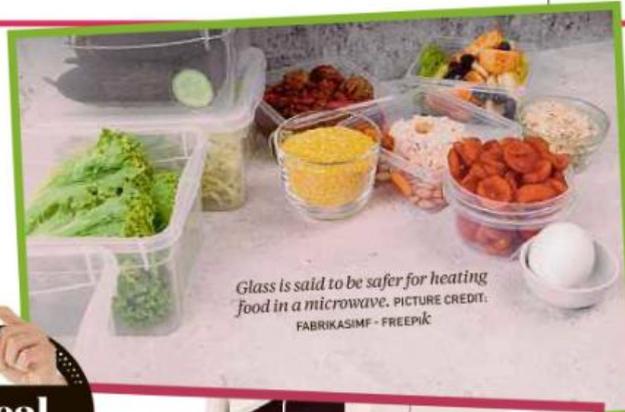
LEECHING OF PLASTIC INTO FOOD

Heating plastic does release microplastics and chemicals under certain conditions, says Dr Zalina Abu Zaid, the Department of Dietetics head at Universiti Putra Malaysia's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

For example, a study published in the journal 'Environmental Science and Technology' found that heating plastic containers in the microwave caused the highest release of microplastics and nanoplastics compared with other scenarios [such as storage of food], with up to millions of particles per cm after just a few minutes of heating.

Research published in 'ACS Food Science and Technology' also compared microwave and conventional heating and found that various substances, including chemicals like antimony and bisphenol A, can migrate from microwaveable plastic food containers into food simulants.

"However, we still don't have long-term human outcome data directly linking reheating food in plastic to cancer. Therefore, while the exposure is real, the disease link is still being studied."



Glass is said to be safer for heating food in a microwave. PICTURE CREDIT: FABRIKASIMF - FREEPIK



Heal

By Meera Murugesan



Plastic microwave containers are commonly used but concerns have been raised about their safety. PICTURE CREDIT: FREEPIK

FAST FACTS

BE SAFE

- Avoid frequent consumption of heavily packaged ready meals
- Transfer food from plastic into glass before reheating
- Replace scratched non-stick pans
- Avoid overheating empty non-stick cookware
- Don't microwave using old or damaged plastic

FAST FACTS

GO FOR GLASS

FOR reheating, glass is considered safer. But make sure lids (if plastic) are removed before heating.

Glass is safer because:

- Glass is chemically inert
- It does not leach plastic additives
- It does not release microplastics
- It is stable at microwave temperatures
- Borosilicate glass is especially heat resistant

From a toxicology standpoint, glass and stainless steel are the lowest-risk materials for food contact



Heating food in plastic can increase exposure to microplastics and additives, but it is unlikely to be a major independent cancer driver, says UPM's Dr Zalina Abu Zaid.

PICTURE CREDIT: DR ZALINA ABU ZAID

meera@nst.com.my

Sarawak targets Asean medical tourism hub destination

KUCHING: Sarawak is strategically positioning itself as Borneo's gateway for medical tourism, tapping into rising demand from neighbouring Indonesia and Brunei, as well as its close proximity to Kalimantan.

Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Minister Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah said the state government is adopting a long-term approach to strengthen its healthcare ecosystem and attract more regional patients, particularly from Indonesia, which accounts for the largest share of Malaysia's medical tourists.

"Our vision for medical tourism in Sarawak is clear. We aim to position Sarawak as a trusted regional gateway for healthcare services, particularly for patients from neighbouring regions such as Kalimantan, Brunei and other parts of Asean," he said.

He was speaking at the soft launch of the inaugural Borneo Global MediTourism Congress & Expo (BGMT) 2026 here yesterday.

Abdul Karim noted that the growing number of private hospitals in Kuching reflects rising demand from both locals and international patients.

"When private hospitals come up in a small city like Kuching, which has less than a million people, it shows there are patients coming over.

"You can even hear them speaking in the hospital lobbies that means there many are seeking treatment in Sarawak," he said.

The minister highlighted that improved air connectivity has further facilitated cross-border medical travel, with flights from Kuching to Jakarta driving



Abdul Karim (second right) performs the gimmick to symbolically launch BGMT 2026. — Photo by Roystein Emmor

an increase in patients from Kalimantan and other parts of Indonesia.

Bruneians are also among those travelling to Sarawak for healthcare services.

Abdul Karim explained that medical tourism benefits beyond hospitals, positively impacting the wider economy as patients are often accompanied by family members who stay for extended periods.

"When they come, they stay in hotels, utilise transportation services, dine in local restaurants and often extend their stay for recuperation and leisure.

"Medical tourism not only benefits hospitals, but also supports tourism operators,

hospitality providers, small businesses and the wider service industry," he said.

He added that Sarawak's proximity to Kalimantan offers a strategic advantage, with Indonesian patients making up nearly 65 per cent of Malaysia's medical tourists.

"This gives Sarawak a unique position to serve as a medical gateway for Borneo. Coupled with improved regional connectivity and economic integration within the BIMP-EAGA region, new opportunities for healthcare and tourism collaboration are opening up," he said.

Abdul Karim also emphasised the importance of integrated infrastructure to support the

sector, including air travel, transport systems, and the upcoming ART system, which will pass by some private hospitals to facilitate access.

He expressed confidence that the Borneo Global MediTourism Congress and Expo will grow into a recognised regional platform for the healthcare tourism industry.

"What matters is consistency, credibility and collaboration with the right support from both the public and private sectors," he said.

The Borneo Global MediTourism Congress and Expo 2026 will take place at the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching on Oct 12 and 13.