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# Foreign remedies easily available

Smuggled medication is openly sold at sundry shops and pasar malam in Johor

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**JOHOR BARU:** Illicit medicine smuggled from Indonesia are being sold openly at some sundry shops and a wholesale market in the state.

The products are mostly bought by foreigners who want to boost their libido, or as painkillers and medication for indigestion and asthma.

A check at a shop in Pasir Gudang showed dozens of medication with foreign brands and labels.

These shops cater to foreign workers in the industrial town.

According to a shop staff who declined to be named, they get their stock from a wholesale market in Johor Baru.

"Some of the medicines and products are locally made while the rest are from Indonesia," said the staff, who also claimed the medication was safe.

It is learnt that some of these medications are also sold at pasar malam in some areas.

Meanwhile, state Health director Dr Salehuddin Abd Aziz, when shown the pictures taken from the shop in Pasir Gudang, said they would investigate before taking appropriate action.

He said there were also cases of unregistered medicines being sold at sundry shops, night markets and wholesale markets around Johor.

"We have raided several stalls in the markets as well as sundry shops selling illegal medicines.

"They may contain drugs that should only be taken upon prescription by medical professionals," he said.

He said the state Health Department seized RM3.75mil worth of unregistered medicine last year.

"Some of these unregistered medicines are also being sold and promoted online.

"We have also set up a Cyber Pharmacy Unit to check unregistered medicine that are being sold online," he said, adding that 35 raids on the online operation were conducted last year.

Dr Salehuddin also urged the public to be cautious with such products and only buy and consume those certified by the Health Ministry, as there could be harmful side effects.

"We have also been conducting campaigns to alert the public on the danger of using unregistered medicines and cosmetic products," he said.



**Traditional remedy:** Medicines, believed to be unregistered, sold at a shop in Johor.

## Ministry: Buy medical products only from licensed outlets

**PETALING JAYA:** Medicines and supplements should only be bought from licensed and reputable premises, says the Health Ministry.

Its Pharmaceutical Services senior director Dr Ramli Zainal said this was to ensure that the products bought were authentic and were registered with the Drug Control Authority (DCA).

"The public is reminded to check on the labels of medicine as well as authenticity of registration to avoid consuming unregistered products which may harm their health.

"Products that are not registered with the DCA have not undergone important evaluations to ensure their quality, efficacy and safety," Dr Ramli said when contacted.

He said consumption of products which contain ingredients that have not been studied or were banned could lead to disastrous consequences.

"Consumption of these products may lead to dangerous health consequences, including allergic reactions and side effects such as decreased kidney functions and even death.

"This is in addition to their obvious lack of efficacy due to having less or none of their actual active ingredients," he said.

Products with anti-diabetic ingredients

such as metformin, for example, should only be consumed under a doctor's supervision, he said.

He cited Cala Plus, which was among the products seized by the ministry in March this year as being one of the products the public should be wary of.

"With reference to Cala Plus, not only is the product unregistered, it is also suspected to contain adulterated agents that are poisonous," he said.

The public should contact the ministry's Pharmacy Enforcement Division or state Pharmacy Enforcement branches should they encounter products that they were suspicious of, he said.

"A registered product with the DCA has two main features; a registration number which starts with 'MAL', followed by eight digits ending with the letter T, A, X or N (for example: MAL19976399X) and as an extra and improved measure, a genuine hologram security sticker which can be found on the product's packaging.

"A device called Meditag™ decoder which is easily available in all licensed pharmacies can be used by consumers to verify the authenticity of Meditag hologram label on the pharmaceutical products purchased," he said.



AKHBAR : THE STAR

MUKA SURAT : 15

RUANGAN : NATION

## Cover mental health issues, insurance firms urged

By MANJIT KAUR  
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**IPOH:** Mental health issues are on the rise and should be covered by insurance companies, says Deputy Health Minister Dr Lee Boon Chye.

Proper medical coverage would help those seeking assistance with such issues, he said.

Dr Lee said a wider range of coverage would also help create awareness of mental health problems.

"One insurance company in Singapore has started to offer coverage for five different types of mental health illnesses, namely major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, Tourette syndrome and obsessive compulsive disorder.

"Of course, sometimes mental illnesses are not well defined.

"But if companies could start with the five conditions mentioned, it would be good," he told a press conference after launching the

Confucius Teaching Cultural Exhibition organised by Poi Lam High School here yesterday.

Malaysia Psychiatric Association patron Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye had suggested to the Health Ministry to push for insurance coverage for mental healthcare and treatment.

However, Dr Lee pointed out that insurance coverage was under the purview of Bank Negara and he hoped that the industry would consider the suggestion.

He added that treatment for mental health issues, including consultations with psychiatrists, could be costly.

Dr Lee also said the data obtained from the National Health and Morbidity Survey showed a worrying trend of mental health issues among teenagers.

In 2015, mental health problems among those aged 16 and above was at 29.2%, he said.

He added that in 2017, the State of

Adolescents Mental Health in Malaysia found that for the age group of 13 to 17, 17.7% of females and 18.9% of males were depressed.

"Also, 42.3% of females and 37.1% of males were anxious, while 10.3% of females and 8.9% of males were stressed," he said.

Dr Lee said to overcome mental health issues, the ministry had organised various programmes in collaboration with local communities and NGOs.