

Quack medicine ring busted in Penang

By IMRAN HILMY
imran@thestar.com.my

BUKIT MERTAJAM: A major syndicate behind the sale and manufacturing of illegal traditional health products worth RM24mil was busted in a raid by the Penang Health Department.

State Health director Datuk Dr Fazilah Shaikh Allaudin said the 30 items were confiscated from 3 premises out of a total of 19 raided by the department's Pharmacy Enforcement Division (CPF) and assisted by the Inland Revenue Board (LHDN) and the police.

She said inspections were conducted based on public complaints and intelligence gathering.

Five men, including two foreign nationals, aged between 34 and 60, were arrested.

Dr Fazilah said the confiscated items comprised 88,000 finished products, more than 500 packages of raw materials suspected to contain scheduled poisons, over 23,000 semi-finished products, two digital devices and 36 machines.

"Among the items seized were

unregistered traditional Chinese medicines suspected to contain prohibited substances such as steroids, paracetamol, allopurinol and other ingredients listed under the Poisons Act 1952.

"Most of the products were used as painkillers and for treatment for conditions such as gout, and were sold in the market for about RM20 per box," she said at a press conference held at a factory in Simpang Ampat yesterday.

She said the discovery of the unregistered health products is an offence under Regulation 7(1) (a) of the Control of Drugs and Cosmetics Regulations 1984 and is punishable under Section 12 of the Sale of Drugs Act 1952, where an individual can be fined up to RM25,000, jailed a maximum three years, or both.

If it involves a company, the fine can reach RM50,000.

It is also an offence under Section 13A of the Poisons Act 1952 and is punishable under Section 32(2) of the same Act, which carries a maximum fine of RM50,000, imprisonment of up to five years, or both.

National CPF director Mohd Zawawi Abdullah said the syndi-



Illegal stash:
A CPF staff member showing some of the unregistered traditional health products seized in raids, at a press conference held at a factory in Simpang Ampat. — ZHAFFARAN NASIB/The Star

cate has been operating since 2020, using the modus operandi of splitting manufacturing processes across different locations to avoid detection.

He said one of the suspects is a 34-year-old mastermind who coordinated operations while the others were workers and relatives of the suspect.

Mohd Zawawi said other syndicate members are believed to be at large.

The Health Ministry has introduced awareness campaigns such as "Tolak Ubat Tidak Sah", known as TOBaTS, to improve public

knowledge on the risks associated with the use of illegal health products.

Further information on TOBaTS can be found on the website pharmacy.moh.gov.my/tobats.

Sellers and distributors are reminded to act responsibly by ensuring only health products registered with a MAL number and bearing the PharmaTech security hologram are handled.

Members of the public are advised to verify the registration status of health products via the NPRA website at www.npra.gov.my under the product

search section.

The public is encouraged to channel complaints or information related to the sale of suspicious medicines or health products through any of the following channels: the SISPA complaints portal, the hotline at 04-229 2319, or any pharmacy enforcement branch.

WATCH THE VIDEO
TheStarTV.com



5 ARRESTED

ILLEGAL MEDICINE SYNDICATE BUSTED

Unregistered products and manufacturing equipment worth RM24m seized

AUDREY DERMAWAN
BUKIT MERTAJAM
news@nst.com.my

AUTHORITIES have crippled a large-scale illegal traditional medicine syndicate in Penang following the seizure of unregistered products and manufacturing equipment worth RM24 million.

The Pharmaceutical Enforcement branch of the Penang Health Department seized the

items in raids on 13 premises, including three factories.

Five men aged 34 to 60 were arrested, including the alleged mastermind and four others believed to be factory workers — two Malaysians and two Bangladeshis.

Penang Health director Datuk Dr Fazilah Shaik Allaudin said the operation followed intelligence gathering and public complaints.

She said the seizures included 88,000 finished products, more

than 500 packages of raw materials suspected to contain scheduled poisons, over 23,000 semi-finished products, two digital devices and 36 machines.

Dr Fazilah said the products were mainly unregistered Chinese traditional medicines suspected of containing steroids, penicillin and allopurinol.

Their production violates the Sale of Drugs Act and the Poisons Act.

Health Ministry Pharmaceuti-



Dr Fazilah Shaik Allaudin

cal Enforcement division director Mohd Zawawi Abdullah said the syndicate operated through a network of interconnected premises.

"The modus operandi involved splitting manufacturing processes across different locations, including raw material storage, processing, packaging, labelling, ware-

housing and marketing."

Investigations showed the syndicate had been active since 2020, selling products locally via

traditional medicine outlets and online, with some reportedly exported to countries including Vietnam.

"The medicines, marketed mainly as painkillers and treatments for ailments such as gout, were sold at an estimated retail price of RM20 per box."

The case is being investigated under Regulation 7(1)(a) of the Control of Drugs and Cosmetics Regulations, punishable under Section 12 of the Sale of Drugs Act.

It carries a fine of up to RM25,000, imprisonment of up to three years, or both. Companies can be fined up to RM50,000.

KKM rampas produk kesihatan tidak sah bernilai RM24 juta

BUKIT MERTAJAM - Sebanyak 88,000 unit produk kesihatan tidak berdaftar termasuk ubat tradisional yang disyaki mengandungi racun berjadual dirampas dalam satu operasi penguatkuasaan membabitkan 19 premis di Pulau Pinang, dengan nilai rampasan keseluruhan dianggarkan mencecah RM24 juta.



ZAWAWI

Selain ubat-ubatan, turut dirampas bahan mentah serta peralatan untuk memproses ubat berkenaan.

Pengarah Kesihatan Pulau Pinang, Datuk Dr Fazilah Shaik Allaudin berkata, operasi hasil risikan dan aduan awam itu turut membawa kepada penahanan lima lelaki berusia antara 34 hingga 60 tahun.

Menurutnya, kesemua yang ditahan terdiri daripada tiga warga tempatan dan dua warga asing dari Bangladesh yang dipercayai terlibat dalam kegiatan pengilangan serta pengedaran produk kesihatan tidak sah.

"Pihak berkuasa turut merampas lebih 500 bungkusan bahan mentah yang disyaki mengandungi racun berjadual, 23,000 produk separa siap, dua peranti digital serta 36 unit mesin pengilangan, termasuk mesin pengisian kapsul dan pembungkusan," katanya pada sidang akhbar di sebuah kilang di Simpang Ampat, Juru di sini pada Isnin.

Operasi turut melibatkan agensi lain seperti polis dan Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri.

Tambah beliau, rampasan melibatkan 13 daripada 19 premis yang diperiksa termasuk kilang, gudang simpanan, premis pelabelan, pemasaran serta logistik.

Sementara itu, Pengarah Bahagian Penguatkuasaan Farmasi Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM), Mohd Zawawi Abdullah berkata, hasil siasatan awal mendapati, kegiatan pengilangan itu sudah beroperasi sejak 2020 sehingga kini dengan modus operandi mengagihkan proses pengeluaran ke beberapa lokasi berbeza bagi mengelak dikesan pihak berkuasa.

"Kilang utama yang diserbu pada Isnin merupakan yang terbesar dan menyumbang sebahagian besar nilai rampasan. Kesemua premis ini berkait antara satu sama lain.

"Premis lain pula digunakan untuk penyimpanan bahan mentah, pelabelan, dokumentasi, pemasaran serta pengangkutan," katanya lagi.

Tambah beliau, seorang lelaki tempatan berusia 34 tahun dikenal pasti sebagai dalang utama yang menyelaras operasi melibatkan kesemua 19 premis tersebut manakala selebihnya bertindak sebagai pekerja dan individu berkaitan.

KUALA LUMPUR: For most married couples, especially newlyweds, having a child is a shared dream, whether it is as soon as possible or at a time that best suits their lifestyle. As a result, many take deliberate steps to plan for pregnancy.

However, for some couples, repeated attempts to conceive end in disappointment, even when the husband and wife are physically healthy and have good fertility levels.

According to experts, effective pregnancy planning entails thorough physical and internal readiness.

Among the most crucial yet frequently underestimated aspects are diet and daily nutrient intake.

In modern life, healthy eating habits are often neglected.

Fast food, high-sugar beverages and unbalanced diets become convenient choices, with most not realising that such habits may pose long-term risks to fertility.

➔ Early steps

Fertility specialist Dr Raihana Ismail said healthy nutrition is vital in improving female fertility as the hormonal system requires sufficient nutrients to function optimally.

She said consuming nutritious food not only supports the production of reproductive hormones, but also helps reduce stress and inflammation in the body, factors which, if prolonged, could negatively affect the chances of conception.

"When husband and wife adopt a balanced diet that includes adequate protein, healthy fats, and essential vitamins and minerals, it indirectly helps stabilise body weight, regulate the menstrual cycle and improve the quality of eggs or sperm produced."

"Healthy eating helps lower stress levels, which could otherwise disrupt hormonal balance and make it difficult for a woman to conceive."

"It also supports better daily energy levels and helps maintain long-term uterine health."

She added that an unbalanced daily diet could have a direct impact on a woman's menstrual cycle.

"A deficiency in key nutrients, such as iron, folic acid, zinc and healthy fats, could lead to irregular menstruation, ovulation problems and chronic fatigue, all of which could make conception more difficult."

"Those who consume excessive sugar and rely heavily on processed

Nutrition vital to improve female fertility: Specialist

➔ 'Proper food supports production of reproductive hormones, reduces stress and inflammation in body'

foods are also at higher risk of hormonal disturbances due to insulin resistance and inflammation in the body."

She said adequate water intake is also important, stressing that regular mealtimes, a healthy lifestyle and sufficient quality sleep are crucial in maintaining hormonal balance.

Raihana, who is also founder and CEO of Efferty International Sdn Bhd, a company that produces supplements specially formulated to assist individuals facing difficulty conceiving, said healthy nutrition and lifestyle habits should be cultivated from an early stage.

➔ Nutrients

According to Raihana, women who

are planning to conceive need to ensure their bodies receive adequate nutrients to support fertility.

Among the key nutrients are protein, iron, folic acid, calcium, vitamin D, omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants, Bernama reported.

"Protein helps in the formation of hormones and reproductive cells (such as ova and sperm). Iron supports the transport of oxygen in the blood while folic acid is essential for egg quality."

"Omega-3 helps maintain hormonal balance while foods that are rich in antioxidants protect cells from damage. Calcium and vitamin D are important for hormonal health and a healthy uterus."

She added that women who are

trying to conceive are encouraged to consume more green vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, fish, eggs and lean meats.

High-caffeine and carbonated drinks should be avoided as they may reduce the chances of pregnancy.

"Taking supplements or foods containing inositol and DHA (an omega-3 fatty acid) could support hormonal balance, regulate the menstrual cycle and improve the quality of sperm and ova."

"Foods containing fibrulose (dietary fibre) as well as live cultures that promote gut health could help improve nutrient absorption and support overall women's health."

Raihana cautioned women against following extreme diets as these could disrupt fertility.

She said unhealthy eating patterns may lead to irregular menstrual cycles and increase the risk of developing polycystic ovary syndrome.

She explained that for men, an unhealthy diet tends to reduce the quality and quantity of sperm, which affects fertility and lowers the couple's chances of conceiving.

"Conversely, a balanced diet helps improve sperm health and motility, supporting the couple's journey towards pregnancy."

➔ Treatment options

Raihana advised women to consult a fertility specialist if they experience difficulty conceiving despite having a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle.

She said fertility specialists would assess various factors, including hormonal balance, the condition of the fallopian tubes and egg quality before recommending appropriate treatment or guidance to improve the chances of pregnancy.

"I would like to emphasise that any woman who has a uterus still has a chance of becoming pregnant, even if

she has been married for a long time."

"Pregnancy is possible as long as her ovulation is normal, hormones are balanced and the reproductive system is functioning well."

"However, factors such as age, hormonal issues, lifestyle, stress or other health conditions may slightly reduce the chances. So, do not lose hope as there are many ways to help increase the likelihood of conceiving."

According to her, women who are unable to conceive naturally still have opportunities to become pregnant through modern medical treatments, such as ovulation induction, intrauterine insemination and in vitro fertilisation.

She said the choice of treatment depends on the underlying cause of infertility, the woman's age, overall health status and the fertility level of both partners.

With proper guidance and monitoring by fertility specialists, these modern treatments not only improve the chances of pregnancy, but could also be carried out safely and effectively.

Raihana advised women to avoid prolonged stress as it could disrupt hormonal balance, affecting ovulation and the menstrual cycle.

In some cases, stress could also lead to extreme fatigue, sleep disturbances and emotional instability, making it more difficult for pregnancy to occur.

"For women who are trying to conceive, the most important advice from specialists is not to put too much pressure on themselves."

"The desire to become pregnant is natural, but excessive stress and anxiety could have negative effects not only on one's emotional wellbeing, but also on physical health and fertility."

"Stress management should be viewed as an integral part of efforts to conceive."



Raihana advised women to consult a fertility specialist if they experience difficulty conceiving despite maintaining a balanced diet. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN