CDPH Warns Consumers Not to Use Certain Skin-Lightening Creams Due to Possible Health Risk

SACRAMENTO -- Dr. Ron Chapman, director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and state health officer, today warned people not to use specific brands of imported skin-lightening creams that have tested positive for high levels of mercury. Mercury is a toxic chemical, and regular or prolonged exposure can result in mercury poisoning. There have been no illnesses associated with these products; however, similar skin-lightening creams have previously been implicated in illnesses nationwide.

The most recent products tested were available for purchase in various markets or on-line, and were labeled in foreign languages, sometimes without listing their ingredients. Product photographs are available on the CDPH website.

Consumers should discontinue use of these products, as well as any face-cream product that lists mercury, mercurio, mercurous chloride, cinnabar, or calomel in the ingredients, or is otherwise packaged without any labeling.

Symptoms of mercury poisoning include irritability, depression; nervousness, difficulty concentrating or remembering; fatigue; tremors, shaking or weakness; tingling or numbness in hands, feet or around the mouth.

If you have any of these symptoms and think they may be the result of using an imported skin-lightening cream, see your health care provider. You can get additional information from the California Poison Control System at 1-800-222-1222, or the California Safe Cosmetics Program hotline at 1-877-325-3223. Information is also available on CDPH’s Mercury in Skin Creams Web page.

Consumers that observe these products being offered for sale are encouraged to call CDPH’s toll-free complaint line at (800) 495-3232.