



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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Letter to the Editor

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Phase Out and Eliminate Mercury Use in the Health Sector

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that can have lasting health effects. There were two reported cases of mercury spillage last week. One spillage occurred in the Merchang Health Clinic and another incident was reported in Desa Rusila Clinic, both in Terengganu. Nevertheless, there could be many more unreported cases in health facilities, schools and homes.

Health workers can be exposed to mercury through broken thermometers and poorly maintained sphygmomanometers (blood pressure devices). Besides this, dentists and dental personnel who work with dental amalgam, which contains mercury, are chronically exposed to mercury vapour. Improper disposal of amalgam scrap also contributes to environmental pollution.

In view of the significant public health problems, disease burdens including among health workers and environmental pollution globally, a legally binding instrument on mercury i.e. the Minamata Convention on Mercury was adopted in 2013. Malaysia has been a signatory to the Convention since 24 September 2014.

In the health sector, the Minamata Convention sets a phase out date of 2020 for most mercury containing products including mercury thermometers and sphygmomanometers and calls for the phase down of dental amalgam.

The Director General of Health Malaysia, in a letter to the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) dated 3 June 2013 stated that in principle the Ministry of Health supports the control and phase out of mercury containing products as specified in the Treaty.

We are heartened by the Ministry's commitment in promoting the use of mercury-free medical devices in health facilities but view that actions taken must be intensified and we need to reach the goal faster.

In terms of the use of dental amalgam, various measures have been proposed in the Convention. In addition to restricting the use of dental amalgam to its encapsulated form, the government should intensify the use of cost-effective and clinically effective mercury-free alternatives for dental restoration. Quality and safe alternatives to dental amalgam should be considered and promoted.

The health sector has an important role to play to reduce and subsequently eliminate mercury use, and move towards the goal of mercury-free health care. We urge the Malaysian government to expedite the measures and strategies to address the issue of mercury contamination and action plans to implement the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

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