

Alarm sounded over pesticides

SOME household pesticides sold in Hongkong contain such high levels of a toxic chemical that they could lead to sickness or even death, the Consumer Council said yesterday.

The substance, known as DDVP (vapona), is one of the most common ingredients in insecticides marketed for home use.

Repeated exposure to it can lead to stomach ache, fainting spells, vomiting or damage to the central nervous system.

In large quantities it can induce a coma and cause death.

In the latest of its regular product surveys, the Consumer Council said of 19 pesticides tested, four (two aerosols and two of the insecticidal coating type) were found to be unsuitable for use at home, especially in the kitchen or larder.

They contained either

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 ONE man has died and four other people have had limbs or fingers amputated after receiving steroid injections from unregistered doctors to treat rheumatism.

The medical tragedy was revealed yesterday by the Consumer Council, which has joined with the Hongkong Medical Association to alert the public to misleading or false advertisements placed by unregistered doctors.

A member of the council's publication committee, Mr Job Young, said the amputations were carried out by Queen Mary Hospital surgeons after all other treatment methods had failed.

He said the patients were admitted suffering from serious infections brought about by an unregistered doctor, who by the repeated

use of unprofessionally administered injections into joints had spread infection from one patient to another. One patient died in January this year despite repeated surgery and treatment.

According to the council's magazine *Choice*, between 1983 and 1984 a total of 13 people suffered infections after being given steroid injections to control pain and inflammation arising from rheumatism, arthritis or rheumatoid arthritis.

Seven of the patients consulted the same doctor, but the use of unsterilised needles caused the spread of infection.

The cases have been referred to Government departments, and legal action is believed to be pending.

DDVP in excess of British standards, or chemical compounds included in the so-called "Dirty Dozen" list of insecticides which have been banned or restricted in many countries because of their extreme toxicity, severe health hazards and environmental pollution risk.

A member of the council's publication committee, Mr Job Young, said yesterday the manufacturer of one brand had withdrawn its products from the market.

The makers of three others had put on a more conspicuous "poison" label on the packaging.

But he pointed out that three of the aerosol samples containing DDVP failed to label themselves as "poison," contrary to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance.

The survey findings have been forwarded to the Medical and Health Department for further action, said Mr Young.

It is understood the Government is now considering stricter laws to control insecticides other than those for agricultural use.

The Consumer Council has been seeking such legislation since its first report on the subject in 1980.

In Hongkong, control of insecticides is confined mainly to those used in agriculture. Domestic insecticides are controlled essentially for their labelling requirements, in some cases, under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance.

Mr Young advised consumers to use lower toxicity insecticides, which took slightly longer to kill a cockroach, but which were less dangerous to humans.

Mr Young also revealed yesterday some of the findings of the council's annual school textbook price survey.

This showed an average increase of 8.7 per cent over last year. The inflation in paper and ink costs ranged from five to 15 per cent.