

## **EFPIA alert on the risk of falsified medicines in COVID-19 pandemic**

In times of crisis like the current COVID-19 pandemic, when demand for basic medical equipment and treatments is increasing exponentially, unfortunately, there is always someone looking to make a quick buck - 'meeting' that demand with counterfeit medicines.

The reasons are simple: it's hugely profitable, the risk of detection is low, the risk of prosecution is even lower, and the penalties are weak. But the impact on patients can be huge: from simple adverse effects to failure to cure or prevent disease progression (increasing mortality, morbidity and prevalence of disease) to active harm and impact on health (including death). From face masks, gloves, hand sanitizers to over the counter medicines like paracetamol and specialized drugs like antibiotics and painkillers the counterfeiters are turning a profit from the COVID-19 crisis. More information can be found in the recently published 'Trade in Counterfeit Pharmaceutical Products' OECD report:

"To provide policy makers with solid empirical evidence about this threat, the OECD and the EU Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) joined forces to carry out a series of analytical studies that deepen our understanding of the scale and magnitude of the problem. The results have been published in a set of reports: Trade in Counterfeit and Pirated Goods: Mapping the Economic Impact (2016), Mapping the Real Routes of Trade in Fake Goods (2017), Trade in Counterfeit Goods and Free Trade Zones: Evidence From Recent Trends (2018), Why do countries Export Fakes (2018), Misuse of Small Parcels for Trade in Counterfeit Goods (2018) and Trends in Trade in Counterfeit and Pirated Goods (2019). The results are alarming. They show that trade in counterfeit and pirated goods amounted to up to 3.3% of world trade in 2016, up from 2.5% in 2013; when considering only the imports into the EU, they amounted to up to 6.8% of imports, compared with 5% three years earlier. Counterfeiters operate swiftly in the globalised economy, misusing free trade zones, taking advantage of many legitimate trade facilitation mechanisms and thriving in economies with insufficient governance standards."

[https://euiipo.europa.eu/tunnel-web/secure/webdav/guest/document\\_library/observatory/documents/reports/Trade in Counterfeit Pharmaceutical Products/Trade in Counterfeit Pharmaceutical Products en.pdf](https://euiipo.europa.eu/tunnel-web/secure/webdav/guest/document_library/observatory/documents/reports/Trade_in_Counterfeit_Pharmaceutical_Products/Trade_in_Counterfeit_Pharmaceutical_Products_en.pdf)

### **Pay attention to the logo**

There has never been a more important time to stress the need for patients and consumers at large to only buy their medicines from legitimate, trusted sources. In fact, given the current pandemic outbreak and the problems posed by restrictions to individual movement implemented by most countries, more and more Europeans are turning to the internet and home deliveries to meet (some of) their basic necessities. There is a significant risk that, when it comes to medicines, they might turn to questionable online suppliers. To help, the EU has

introduced a common logo for legally operating online pharmacies/retailers in EU countries. One of the measures to fight against falsified medicines, the logo vouches for the authenticity of the websites and guarantees the safety of the products.

There is not yet possible to dispense prescription drugs remotely in the Czech Republic, so if the e-shop offers for example, antibiotics, insulins, drugs for erectile dysfunction and other prescription drugs, it is an unverified supplier. Purchase of paracetamol or vitamins can also be a risk in such an e-shop.

The EU has therefore introduced a common logo for legally operating online pharmacies/retailers in EU countries, which guarantees the authenticity of websites and guarantees the safety of products. A list of authorized online retailers of medicines can be found on the websites of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the State Institute for Drug Control (SUKL).

<https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/falsified-medicines/buying-medicines-online>

<http://www.sukl.cz/modules/apotheke/search.php?lang=1>