

Over 3 million medicines and devices seized in UK as part of global crackdown

Over 3 million medicines and medical devices valued at over £9 million have been seized by UK officers as part of a global operation tackling the illegal online sale of medicines and medical devices. In the UK, 113,000 illegally operating websites were also removed, or had their URLs blocked. 8 search warrants were executed, with 7 criminals arrested.

In a week of action coordinated by Interpol, this year's 'Operation Pangea' ran from 18 to 25 May and saw over 100 countries joining forces to seize non-compliant medical products and also to identify and remove thousands of illegally operating websites and URLs offering medicines and devices. The operation also involved coordinating the arrests of several suspected organised criminals.

Among the medicines seized were anti-depressants, erectile dysfunction tablets, painkillers, anabolic steroids and slimming pills

Andy Morling, Head of Enforcement at the MHRA, said:

Criminals selling medicines and devices illegally are not only breaking the law but have no regard for your health. Taking fake or unlicensed medicines or using a non-compliant medical device could put your health and safety in danger and may lead to serious health issues.

Operation Pangea is a powerful example of what can be achieved through partnership working to tackle this kind of offending. We will continue to work closely with our international partners and UK Border Force to prevent unlicensed medicines from entering the UK, to identify illegally operating websites and to bring those criminals behind them to justice.

The MHRA will be following the week of action with a detailed analysis of the global results to create a better understanding of current and emerging threats. This work includes the identification of 'hotspot' exporting countries, favoured high-risk medicines being traded on the black market, and the ever-evolving business models of criminals worldwide seeking to take advantage of the public.

The MHRA's [#FakeMeds campaign](#) aims to encourage people in the UK who choose to buy medication online to take steps to make sure they are purchasing from safe and legitimate sources. The campaign also highlights the dangers of fake

medicines sold online and the negative health effects that taking them can have. It also encourages people to report suspicious offers and any side effects experienced to the [Yellow Card scheme](#).

MHRA safety advice when buying medicines:

Be careful when buying medicines online.

Medicines and medical devices are not ordinary consumer goods and their sale and supply is tightly controlled. Websites operating outside the legal supply chain may seem tempting, for example, a prescription medicine offered without a prescription. Not only are these sites breaking the law – they are putting your health at risk.

Do not self-prescribe.

Self-diagnosis and self-medication can be very dangerous. If you have a concern about your health, visit your GP, get a correct diagnosis and if medicines are prescribed, buy them from a legitimate source.

[Visit the #FakeMeds website](#) for tools and resources to help people purchase medication or medical devices safely online.

Ends

Notes to Editors

- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the benefits justify any risks.
- MHRA is a centre of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency which also includes the [National Institute for Biological Standards and Control \(NIBSC\)](#) and the [Clinical Practice Research Datalink \(CPRD\)](#). MHRA is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.
- Operation Pangea is an international initiative to target the illegal internet trade in medicines. It was instigated by the MHRA in April 2006 and started as the UK Internet Day of Action (IDA). The annual operation is the largest internet based enforcement action of its kind to date and is coordinated by INTERPOL, together with the World Customs Organisation (WCO), the Permanent Forum of International Pharmaceutical Crime (PFIPC), the Heads of Medicines Agencies Working Group of Enforcement Officers (WGEO), Europol and the Pharmaceutical Security Institute (PSI), and supported by the Center for Safe Internet Pharmacies (CSIP) and private sector companies including LegitScript, Google, Mastercard, Visa, American Express and PayPal.
- The #FakeMeds campaign is a public health campaign which aims to reduce the harm caused by purchasing fake, unlicensed or counterfeit medical products online. The #FakeMeds campaign site gives practical steps the public can take when purchasing medical products safely online. This includes purchasing from recognised sources and the product marks to

look out for. Previous phases of the campaign have focused on fake erectile dysfunction (ED) medicines, dodgy diet pills and fake self-testing STI kits. [Further advice and top tips to safe purchasing medicines and medical products online](#). Follow #FakeMeds on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

- The MHRA [Yellow Card scheme](#) helps the MHRA monitor the safety of all healthcare products in the UK to ensure they are acceptably safe for patients and those that use them.