### Counterfeit versus falsified medicines.

**Counterfeit medicines** are **fake** medicines that are often produced in unsafe and unsanitary conditions. This means they are not inspected by regulatory authorities, making it impossible to know what ingredients the counterfeit medicines contain.

Counterfeits can be very dangerous and are a serious public health risk. The primary danger in taking a counterfeit medicine is that patients are putting something into their body that may not help their current condition and, more alarmingly, could result in harmful effects to their overall health.

Experts have identified harmful substances within counterfeit medicines such as boric acid, leaded highway paint, floor polish, brick dust and heavy metals.

**Falsified medicines** are **fake** medicines that pass themselves off as real, authorised medicines. The European Union (EU) has a strong legal framework for the licensing, manufacturing, and distribution of medicines, centred around the Directive on falsified medicines for human use, so that only licensed pharmacies and approved retailers are allowed to offer medicines for sale, including legitimate sale via the internet. The European Medicines Agency works closely with its partners on the implementation of these laws.

Falsified medicines may:

* contain ingredients of low quality or in the wrong doses.
* be deliberately and fraudulently mislabelled with respect to their identity or source.
* have fake packaging, the wrong ingredients, or low levels of the active ingredients.

Falsified medicines **do not** pass through the usual evaluation of quality, safety and efficacy that is required for the EU authorisation procedure. Because of this, they can be a health threat.

Until recently, the most frequently falsified medicines in wealthy countries were expensivelifestylemedicines, such as hormones, steroids, and antihistamines. In developing countries, they have included medicines used to treat life-threatening conditions such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV / AIDS.

In June 2024, The World Health Organisation (WHO) issued a medical product alert on falsified semaglutides (medicines that are used for treatment of type 2 diabetes and obesity). The alert addressed 3 falsified batches of product of specific brand Ozempic which had been detected in Brazil, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Details of the alert can be found at [**WHO issues warning on falsified medicines used for diabetes treatment and weight loss**](https://www.who.int/news/item/20-06-2024-who-issues-warning-on-falsified-medicines-used-for-diabetes-treatment-and-weight-loss)**.**

The phenomenon of falsified medicines is **on the increase**, with more and more medicines now being falsified. These include expensive medicines, such as anticancer medicines, and medicines in high demand, such as antivirals.

**Falsified vs. counterfeit medicines.**

Falsified medicines **are not** the same as counterfeit medicines:

* **Falsified medicines** are fake medicines that are designed to mimic real medicines.
* **Counterfeit medicines** are medicines that do not comply with intellectual-property rights or that infringe trademark law.

**Medicines on the internet**

Obtaining medicines through unregulated and unregistered internet sites or via social media poses a potentially serious health risk, as these medicines are not made by trained scientists under the rigorous conditions required for patient safety.

Patients also increase their risk of being victims of credit card fraud or having their identities stolen.

Prescription medicines should only be used as prescribed by, and under the supervision of, a qualified healthcare professional. When purchasing medicines online, patients should be mindful to only choose a pharmacy or online retailer that is registered with the MHRA or Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

All pharmacies operating in Great Britain must be registered with The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), who also operate a voluntary internet pharmacy logo scheme. The logo helps consumers to identify legitimate online pharmacies so that you can be sure you are purchasing safe and genuine medicines online. The GPhC logo contains the pharmacy’s unique seven-digit registration number, and when clicked takes the user to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) website to help verify the pharmacy.



The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), run the #FakeMeds campaign, which helps to protect patients’ health and money by providing quick and easy tools so they can avoid fake medical products when they shop online.

[**Report suspected #FakeMeds**](https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/?utm_source=fmsite&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=fakemeds&utm_content=graphic)

### Patients can report suspected #FakeMeds, Falsified medicines or side effects, fake medical devices and products online using the [MHRA Yellow Card scheme](https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/?utm_source=fmsite&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=fakemeds&utm_content=text)

### Useful links

### <https://fakemeds.campaign.gov.uk>

### <https://fakemeds.campaign.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2020/03/FakeMeds-toptips-General-2020.pdf?utm_source=FakeMeds-web&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=COVID-19>