



Pharmaceutical crime

We are seeing a significant increase in the manufacture, trade and distribution of counterfeit, diverted, stolen and illicit medicines and medical devices. This is not a new phenomenon, but its increasing prevalence in all parts of the world – compounded by a significant rise in Internet trade – gives major cause for concern. It is impossible to quantify the extent of the problem, but in some areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America, counterfeit medical products can form up to 30% of the market.

The fight against pharmaceutical crime is crucial in order to protect public health on a global scale. Fake drugs often contain the wrong amount of active ingredient – too little, too much or none at all – posing a major health risk to the patients who innocently consume them and, at worst, can result in heart attacks, coma or death.

Pharmaceutical crime crosses geographical borders, affecting multiple countries as source, transit or destination point and undermining the credibility of the legitimate supply chain. International organized criminal networks are responsible for this traffic, attracted by the huge profits to be made. Co-ordinated and cross-sector action on an international level is therefore vital in order to identify, investigate and prosecute the criminals behind these crimes.

Connecting stakeholders

At INTERPOL, we work to bring together different players – including police, customs, health regulatory authorities, scientists and the private sector – to tackle these crimes. Our global network of member countries allows us to connect stakeholders across the world, and carry out effective training and operations in specific regions and online.

We have also developed key partnerships through the International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce (IMPACT), created by the World Health Organization. With a global membership drawn from a wide variety of sectors, it presents a united front against the growing challenge. We have taken the lead in the IMPACT enforcement group (together with the Permanent Forum on International Pharmaceutical Crime) to develop a multisectoral approach at national, regional and international level.

Supporting officers in the field

INTERPOL has developed an operational model promoting concrete law enforcement actions in the field. We deliver an 'interventions package' to support all stages of an investigation, from gathering intelligence, planning and implementing an operation, through to legal issues for cases that are brought to court. In addition, we collect, analyse and share criminal data in order to detect patterns and trends and to shape future operational activities.

Enforcement training courses – Our training portfolio covers both practical training as a precursor to on-the-ground operations, and specialized courses in investigative techniques. Participating officers come from police, customs and drug regulatory authorities, government departments and independent institutes. The assistance of trainers from the private sector completes the exchange of expertise and best practice.



Field operations – On-the-ground operations are run on a national and regional level, tackling physical outlets as well as Internet suppliers. These operations combine the expertise of agencies in a variety of sectors, supported by key scientific partners, and target many types of illicit medicines including those intended to treat life-threatening diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV, as well as antibiotics, analgesics, anti-virals and erectile dysfunction drugs.

Delivering tangible results

Our flagship field operations – Storm (Southeast Asia), Mamba (Eastern Africa) and Pangea (targeting the Internet) – have seen improved results with each phase. Raids carried out on licit and illicit markets have delivered increasing numbers of seizures, arrests, convictions and the closure of illegal websites, highlighting the success of cross-sector enforcement action and confirming the importance of continued intervention in this area.

Looking ahead

In order to expand the reach of our activities, we are working to fulfil the following strategic aims:

- To maintain collaboration with current stakeholders and develop new partnerships across a wide range of sectors.
- To develop national and regional enforcement plans based on a multisectoral approach.
- To promote and deliver capacity-building packages, specific to the needs of member countries, comprising training, operational support, awareness raising, information exchange and investigation follow-up.
- To integrate existing reporting systems so the various agencies involved can better exchange information and alert each other to serious cases of transnational pharmaceutical crime.
- To put counterfeit medical product and pharmaceutical crime at the top of government agendas to assure high-level support.



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Contact information

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For matters relating to specific crime cases, please contact your local police or the INTERPOL National Central Bureau in your country.