



DAYTONA BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

AND THE

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL



Counterfeit Drugs

Fake Drugs Are Bad Medicine

The traffic in counterfeit drugs poses a grave threat to all Americans—and people everywhere. According to some estimates, more than 10 percent of all pharmaceuticals in the global supply chain are counterfeit. In some countries, fake pharmaceuticals account for 70 percent of all drugs in the supply chain.



Online pharmacies sometime sell dangerous fake drugs, but consumers can take steps to protect themselves.

Counterfeit medicines are products deliberately and fraudulently manufactured to be mistaken for legitimate drugs. In the words of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, counterfeit medicine is fake medicine—pure and simple. One organization, the Center for Medicine in the Public Interest, estimates that sales of counterfeit drugs in the United States totals \$75 billion every year. That figure has almost doubled since 2005. (The worldwide total was estimated at \$320 billion.)

Counterfeit drugs are not only widespread, but dangerous. One recent article in a medical journal likened the counterfeiting of drugs to murder. People die as the result of taking diluted drugs, drugs with fake ingredients, or legitimate drugs that are repackaged after their expiration date with fake labeling that indicates they are still useful. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration lists the following threats to health caused by counterfeit drugs:

- Toxic effects: The counterfeit drugs contain ingredients that, if ingested or injected, can cause health problems.
- Unintended effects: Some counterfeits are presented as substitutes for other drugs. For example, counterfeiters recently emptied bottles of the anti-psychotic drug Zyprexa and filled the bottles with aspirin. The drugs had no therapeutic value.
- Ineffective treatments: Some fake drugs contain some active ingredient, but are sub-potent. Sub-potent drugs are especially dangerous in the treatment of illnesses like HIV and malaria.
- No active ingredients. Some drugs are just chalk or water. A counterfeit version of Serostim, a growth hormone used to treat AIDS patients, was found to have no active ingredient.



DAYTONA BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

AND THE

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL



The most common counterfeit drugs in the United States are those manufactured to mimic drugs prescribed for the treatment of chronic diseases such as high cholesterol, hypertension, antibiotics, cancer and HIV/AIDS. These drugs are expensive. That may cause people to search for cheaper sources of drugs and make them prey to unlicensed pharmacies—usually online-- that may knowingly or unknowingly provide counterfeit drugs. The counterfeit drugs that are sold may be cheaper and more easily available than from legitimate sources, but they still reflect a high profit margin that makes the counterfeit drug trade especially lucrative.

Because the markup on counterfeit drugs is so high, they have become attractive to organized crime groups. Criminals generally prefer to mimic branded drugs, which are known for their high quality but are expensive, since the profits are so much greater than for low-cost drugs, where the markup would be less. Some criminals are attracted to the manufacture and sale of counterfeit drugs because the penalties are less severe than for other types of crime. Some gangs and organized crime groups involved in the trafficking and distribution of counterfeit drugs use their profits to finance other illegal activities, including terrorism.

According to the authors of one academic article, counterfeit drug manufacturing and distribution are an inevitable choice of criminals because they fit neatly into one of the theories of crime prevention, which states that a crime occurs when a suitable target and a potential offender meet at a suitable time and place without adequate supervision. Drug counterfeiting generally thrives in situations where access may be limited and the prices are high.

Most counterfeit drugs come to the United States from other countries, putting a strain on border and customs resources. India's 15,000 illicit fake drug factories are believed to account for 75 percent of the world supply of counterfeit drugs. Generally, developing countries are the source of counterfeit drugs because regulation and supervision may be lax. Counterfeit drugs are a huge problem in Third World countries, especially in Africa, where fake HIV drugs have resulted in many deaths. As many as 200,000 malaria deaths in Africa may have resulted from the use of sub-potent anti-malarials.

Sadly, many counterfeit drugs are aimed at the treatment of cancer because people with cancer may be desperate for treatment or a cure. People who obtain drugs that purport to treat cancer without a prescription risk further deterioration of their health if the drug is toxic or ineffective. Consumers should recognize the following "red flags" when it comes to purchasing so-called anti-cancer drugs:

- Any drug that purports to treat any form of cancer
- Any drug that promises to "shrink malignant tumors"
- Any drug that is advertised to "make skin cancers disappear"
- Any drug that promises not to make you nauseous. While some anti-cancer drugs don't make recipients sick, no legitimate source would advertise a drug this way.



DAYTONA BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

AND THE

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL



- Any drug that promises to negate the need for surgery, chemotherapy, radiation treatments, or other conventional treatment

One other note about fake drugs: Easy-to-get fake illegal drugs can cause illness or death. Cheap synthetic marijuana and cocaine may make users seriously ill or cause seizures and hallucinations. These drugs are often available at “head shops” or on the Internet.

While counterfeit drugs are a growing problem, there are ways to detect them and keep from suffering their ill effects—or being swindled out of money.

- Use only drugs that have been prescribed by a physician after a physical examination, and fill the prescription only at a legitimate pharmacy.
- Don't buy drugs from sites that sell prescription drugs without a prescription.
- Buy medicines only from state-licensed pharmacies that are located in the United States. Find your state's contact information at the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy website at www.napb.info.
- Look for the VIPPS (Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites) seal at online pharmacies. A list of VIPPS-verified pharmacies is available at www.vipps.info.
- Don't buy drugs from other countries. Not only is it illegal, but it could harm your health.
- If using an online pharmacy, make sure it has a legitimate bricks-and-mortar street address, a licensed physician as well as a pharmacist on duty and available.



This symbol indicates that an online pharmacy meets high standards.

- Discard the medication if it is of a different size or color from the medication you are used to taking.
- Discard the medication if it has a different or odd-looking brand insignia or marking.
- Discard the medication if it dissolves differently or badly or has a strange or bitter taste that you are not accustomed to.

While there are many good online pharmacies, the fact is that some are dangerous. The FDA warns that some medications sold online

- Are fake



DAYTONA BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

AND THE

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL



- Make false or exaggerated claims
- Have harmful ingredients
- Have expired
- Aren't safe to use with other drugs
- Aren't properly labeled
- Aren't stored or shipped the right way

Pharmaceutical companies are striking back at the counterfeiters, however. According to a report in the *New York Times*, one group of companies is taking the counterfeiters head on. Sproxil, one company, uses a unique scratch-off code on the label of each medication. The consumer then texts the code to Sproxil's server. If the medication is shown to be real, the consumer buys it. If not, the consumer can report the fake.