



PHARMACEUTICAL CRIME

Our Response

THE SITUATION

Pharmaceutical crime is a major global public health concern, with the trade of counterfeit and illicit medical products a truly global criminal phenomenon affecting all countries through source, transit or destination points.

Patients across the world put their health and even their lives at risk by unknowingly consuming fake and unregulated medical products, or products that have been altered, diverted, badly stored or have passed their expiry date.

Growing consumer demand, the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread use of the Internet has meant that the advertisement, sale and supply of illicit medical products from unauthorized and unregulated websites has become a growing problem in recent years.



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THE ILLICIT GOODS AND GLOBAL HEALTH PROGRAMME (IGGH)

INTERPOL's IGGH programme shares a strong commitment with member countries and industry alike to continue improving global cooperation and enforcement capabilities in the area of pharmaceutical crime.

We work to dismantle criminal networks and reduce the risk these crimes pose to public health by:

- Collecting data and disseminating intelligence (e.g. analytical reports and threat assessments);
- Coordinating transnational law enforcement operations;
- Supporting multi-agency task forces to improve cooperation between police, customs, regulatory bodies and the private sector;
- Raising public awareness of pharmaceutical crime and helping consumers to make informed choices.

INTERPOL endeavors to create modern approaches to tackle pharmaceutical crime in partnership with law enforcement agencies, international organizations, industry and INTERPOL member countries.

A number of global and regional initiatives coordinated by INTERPOL are in place to respond to specific trends and issues:

Operation Pangea (Global)

- Since 2008, Operation Pangea has been combating the global trafficking of counterfeit pharmaceuticals marketed and sold online. Pangea also aims to raise public awareness of the risks associated with buying medicines from unregulated websites.
- In 2021, Operation Pangea XIV resulted in seizures of illicit medical products with an estimated value of around USD 23,414,483. In addition, 113,020 websites were removed, the highest number since the first Operation Pangea in 2008.

Action against tramadol trafficking (Regional)

- Also within the framework of Operation Pangea, this initiative was established in 2020 with the most affected countries of tramadol trafficking across Africa. The aim is to drive investigations between both source and destination countries.

Operations Afya and Heera (Regional)

- Afya is an INTERPOL-led operation targeting criminal groups involved in the manufacture and distribution of illicit goods and pharmaceuticals in the Southern Africa region. Meanwhile, Operation Heera targets the trafficking of illegal medicines across Western Africa. Both operations also aim to raise awareness amongst the public about the dangers posed by the use of illicit goods.
- In 2021, Operation Afya led to the seizure of counterfeit products to the estimated value of USD 3,532,489, triggering over 300 criminal and administrative cases with 179 offenders apprehended.

Operation Qanoon (Regional)

- The Qanoon Initiative was launched in 2015 following an analysis report, which revealed the threat of pharmaceutical crime to the health and wellbeing of the people of the Middle East and North African region.
- In 2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, the operation led to a number of significant seizures, including 63,418 facemasks in Jordan and 85,000 medical products (facemasks, gloves, thermometers, medical glasses) in Qatar.

Operations targeting COVID-19 related crime

- Operation Vigilant Interdiction (OVI) was established as a global operation in 2020 to implement countermeasures against the emerging threat of COVID-19 related crime. Through engagement with member countries and partner organizations, INTERPOL's IGGH programme developed and provided risk analysis, actionable intelligence and INTERPOL notices.
- Operation Flash – Illicit Pharmaceutical Products in Africa was established in late 2021 between INTERPOL and AFRIPOL, which will jointly launch the first operation involving their common member countries. The operation will target counterfeit and illicit vaccines, medicines and medical devices and their use across Africa.



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