



“Medicines are not sweets”

A European campaign to promote the responsible use of over-the-counter medicines

Read the leaflet, follow the instructions, and use (over-the-counter) medicines responsibly. This is the core message shared of a European-wide awareness campaign launched by regulatory authorities to encourage the responsible use of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines. The initiative targets anyone who occasionally uses OTC products such as painkillers, nasal sprays, antacids, or cough syrups.

These medicines, available without a prescription in pharmacies, OTC outlets, and supermarkets, are intended for the treatment of minor ailments like pain, fever, or the common cold. However, no medicine is entirely risk-free. Misuse can lead to unwanted side effects or even dependency. That is why it is essential to treat OTC medicines with the same caution as prescription drugs: always read the package leaflet and follow the recommended instructions.

“OTC medicines play an important role in maintaining health and are widely used by citizens, but they must always be taken responsibly. We must all remember that they are not sweets - they are medicines with a benefit-risk profile, just like prescription drugs”, says AIFA’s President **Robert Nisticò**.

“Before taking any OTC medicine, it is crucial to check the packaging and leaflet to understand how to use it correctly and for how long. If you are unsure, consult a healthcare professional, and seek medical advice if symptoms persist or serious side effects occur. Let’s protect our health together”.

Since the use of OTC medicines often crosses national borders, European countries have joined forces in this campaign, which highlights key steps for safer use: read the leaflet, respect the maximum recommended duration of use, and consult a doctor if symptoms continue.

“Medicines are not sweets” is the first joint campaign launched by the Heads of Medicines Agencies (HMA) - the network of Heads of European Medicines Agencies, working closely with the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Commission to ensure the safety, quality and efficacy of medicines.

Campaign materials are available on AIFA's social media channels: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Bluesky and YouTube.