

## Warning about sharp rise in illegal medicines sold in the EU

Illegal medicines marketed as GLP-1 receptor agonists for weight loss and diabetes pose serious risk to health

EMA and the Heads of Medicines Agencies (HMA) are warning the public about the growing threat of illegal medicines being advertised and sold online across the European Union (EU).

In recent months there has been a sharp rise in the number of illegal medicines marketed as GLP-1 receptor agonists such as semaglutide, liraglutide and tirzepatide for weight loss and diabetes. These products, often sold via fraudulent websites and promoted on social media, are not authorised and do not meet necessary standards of quality, safety and efficacy.

Such illegal products pose a serious risk to public health. They may not contain the claimed active substance at all and may contain harmful levels of other substances.

People who use these products are therefore at a very high risk of treatment failure, unexpected and serious health problems and dangerous interactions with other medicines.

Authorities have identified hundreds of fake Facebook profiles, advertisements and e-commerce listings, many of which are hosted outside the EU. Some fraudulent websites and social media advertisements misuse official logos and use false endorsements to mislead consumers. Illegal suppliers are being actively monitored by national authorities. Enforcement actions include ordering product withdrawals, blocking websites and cross-border collaboration with enforcement officers and other international partners.

GLP-1 receptor agonists are prescription medicines for serious health conditions such as diabetes and obesity. They should be taken under the supervision of a healthcare professional. Patients who think they might benefit from treatment with GLP-1 receptor agonists should talk to a doctor and should not buy them without a prescription or from sources other than legitimate retailers.

### Obtaining medicines from legitimate suppliers in the EU

The online sale of prescription only medicines is not allowed in all Member States.

To help the public identify legitimate online medicine retailers, the EU introduced a [common logo](#) which appears on the websites of all registered online pharmacies and retailers. Clicking on the logo takes buyers to a national register of authorised retailers.

If a website does not have this logo or is not listed on a national register, the website is fraudulent and

operating illegally.



The national flag and the text are an integral part of the logo. Only national flags of an EU Member State, as well as those of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, can be displayed.

### **Warning signs that a medicine may be illegal**

A product is likely to be illegal if:

- it is advertised as “endorsed” by a national authority or features official logos of a national authority or EMA;
- it is sold through unofficial websites or social media platforms;
- it is claimed to be superior to authorised treatments without scientific evidence;
- it is not available through licensed pharmacies or healthcare providers;
- the website offering it does not have the common EU logo or is not listed on a national register.

### **Important information for patients and their families**

- Illegal medicines are being promoted online across the EU on fraudulent websites and social media, often using false claims and fake endorsements.
- They may not contain the claimed active substance at all and may contain harmful levels of other substances.
- Illegal medicines pose serious risks to health, including treatment failure, unexpected and serious side effects and dangerous interactions with other medicines.
- Legal online medicines retailers are listed in [registers of national authorities](#).
- EMA and national authorities do not endorse or promote specific products or brands. Any claim suggesting otherwise is false.
- If you are offered a medicine online, especially one claiming to be endorsed by a national authority, consult official sources such as EMA or your national competent authority.
- **The online sale of prescription only medicines is not permitted in all Member States;** always obtain prescription medicines through a qualified healthcare professional and a licensed pharmacy.
- Report any suspicious websites, advertisements or products to your national competent authority.