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UK high street pharmacies have to be registered with the pharmacists' regulatory body, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB).

While many registered pharmacies have online facilities and work within the law, unregistered outfits are also operating on the Internet. A UK web address (.co.uk) is no guarantee that the pharmacist is working out of the UK and/or registered with the RPSGB.

It is therefore impossible to guarantee the quality or effectiveness of all prescribed medicines ordered online, and especially those ordered without a prescription. The Internet is one of the sources of the increasing trade in fake or counterfeit medicines and devices.

These include antibiotics, slimming aids, anti-malarial pills, treatments for erectile problems, such as Viagra and Cialis, and recently, the cholesterol lowering medicine Lipitor. The World Health Organisation estimates that fake medicines already make up more than 10 per cent of the global medicines market.

The Internet is also a source of illegally marketed medicines, such as ketamine, an anaesthetic used in animals, marketed as a recreational drug, and ephedrine, a nervous system stimulant, marketed as a dietary supplement or sports aid.

Devices, such as heart valves, glucose meters, and cholesterol checking kits are also available on the Internet. Again, the quality and safety of these products is unknown.

The MHRA has been very active in tracking down counterfeit and illegal products and has seized consignments and prosecuted manufacturers and importers. But it is an increasingly lucrative and growing market.



# Influencing Policy

As well as operating the current regulatory system, the MHRA works to influence the shape of future regulation. As new technologies, such as tissue engineering and genetics start to offer new treatment possibilities, the Agency is helping to design and implement new safeguards, usually through new EU legislation.

The Agency was a leading contributor to new EU rules, which will greatly improve the availability of medicines suitable for children—an area previously neglected in medicines development.

The MHRA works with the Department of Health to ensure that regulation supports wider healthcare policies. This includes helping patients to make more informed choices about medicines through better labelling and information; and making it easier for people to get the medicines they need, by making more medicines available over the counter,

and enabling suitably trained nurses and pharmacists to prescribe medicines.

The MHRA has a wide range of international links, and is respected as one of the leading regulatory authorities for medicines and medical devices worldwide. The Agency has shared its regulatory expertise with Malta, Latvia and the Czech Republic, in a bid to help countries that have recently joined the EU to develop the systems needed to play an active part in European regulation.

The Agency has been working with professional education and training bodies in the UK to raise awareness of the importance of regulation and safe use of products in medical training and continuing professional development programmes. The MHRA is working on an accreditation scheme with the medical Royal Colleges to grant the equivalent of a 'driving licence' for the safe use of particular pieces of equipment for different specialties.





If you are a patient, healthcare professional, or work for a pharmaceutical company or medical device manufacturer and would like more information on the work of the MHRA, including various publications, or if you would like to know how you can contribute to the safe use of medicines, medical devices and equipment, please contact:

**The Medicines and Healthcare products  
Regulatory Agency**

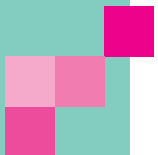
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# Medicines & Medical Devices Regulation:

What you need to know

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