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Watching Out For Counterfeit Medicine

Counterfeit prescription drugs are a real and growing threat to the health and safety of consumers. With more drugs being sold on the internet and imported from other countries, Americans need to be more vigilant than ever about the medications they take.

The U.S. based Centre for Medicines in the Public Interest predicts that counterfeit drug sales will reach \$75 billion globally in 2010, an increase of more than 90 percent from 2005.

Recently the European Commission released figures showing that there has been a dramatic increase in pharmaceutical counterfeiting, with seizures in Europe hitting an all time high of over 2.5 million items. The U.S. is not immune. The last five years saw a tripling of seizures of counterfeit drugs by U.S. Customs.

Drug counterfeiting is reaching crisis proportions:

According to the New York Times, counterfeit glycerin from China led to mass poisonings and death in China, Panama, Haiti, Bangladesh, Argentina, Nigeria and India.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there are 200,000 or more deaths a year as the result of fake medicine.

WHO estimates that a fifth of the one million annual deaths from malaria would be prevented if all medicines for it were genuine and taken properly.

According to The Hamilton Spectator a woman in Hamilton, Ontario suffered a minor stroke as the result of taking medicine she obtained from a Canadian pharmacy; medicine she later learned was fake.

Closer to home, a woman in St. Louis who was battling breast cancer, took a medication prescribed by her doctor, only to get sicker. She would soon learn that the medication she was taking was a counterfeit prescription, originating from a counterfeiting ring in Miami.

WHO reported that a young woman in Argentina died of liver failure after receiving toxic counterfeit treatments for anemia.

Clearly, counterfeiting is not just a problem limited to Asia, Africa or Europe. Obviously, counterfeiting is greatest in those regions where the regulatory and legal oversight is weakest. But it's a global problem with serious consequences for Americans.

The World Health Organization cautions against purchasing medicines over the Internet from sites that conceal their physical address. According to WHO, the medicines on these sites are counterfeit in over 50 percent of the cases.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) continues to advise consumers to proceed with caution when purchasing medications. One of the best places to get up-to-the-minute information on the topic of drug counterfeiting, is the from website: www.BuySafeDrugs.info.