

# Online drugs often fake

More than 60% of drugs sold online are fake or substandard.

This is according to a report published last week by the European Alliance for Access to Safe Medicines. Researchers from the alliance ordered a range of prescription drugs from 100 websites, choosing those that were likely to appeal to the public, using factors such as good use of English, apparent access to a pharmacist and a telephone contact.

Their analysis showed that 62% of the drugs bought online were substandard or counterfeit and that only 38% were genuine branded drugs. Moreover, 16% of the branded drugs were illegal imports from outside the European Union, and 33% had no information leaflet in the pack delivered to the purchaser. All were bought without a prescription, which meant they were supplied illegally.

The analysis included a wide range of drugs, including tadalafil (Cialis), vardenafil (Levitra), and sildenafil (Viagra) for erectile dysfunction; the statin atorvastatin (Lipitor); the bronchodilator fluticasone propionate (Seretide); the Alzheimer's disease treatments donepezil (Aricept) and galantamine (Reminyl); the antidepressants olanzapine (Zyprexa) and venlafaxine (Efexor); and risperidone (Risperdal), which is used to treat schizophrenia and symptoms of bipolar disorder. Many of the drugs were delivered without boxes or information leaflets, and where these were provided they were in a number of different languages.

Most of these online pharmacies did not require a prescription to sell scheduled drugs and only 4.4% of them were licensed by a pharmacy board, meaning that they were not bound by any professional, legal or safety regulations. 80% of "approvals" linked to bogus "approval" web pages.

The supply of drugs by online pharmacies is apparently rising rapidly, mainly because people are too busy to make an appointment to see a doctor. The alliance says that search engines should disable online access to illegal pharmacy websites and warn consumers of the dangers of obtaining drugs online, and credit card companies should stop financial transactions for illegal online pharmacies.