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## Warning of counterfeit ivermectin tablets sold via social media

The FAMHP and Sciensano are warning about counterfeit ivermectin tablets that are being used for self-medication against COVID-19. Investigations show that these counterfeit ivermectin tablets are systematically underdosed or seriously contaminated with bacteria. In 2021, a total of 12 529 counterfeit ivermectin tablets originating from postal packages were seized. These tablets are regularly found in postal packages to this day.

Ivermectin is an antiparasitic agent used to treat conditions such as scabies. Since the start of coronavirus crisis, ivermectin has been claimed to be effective against COVID-19. Although several health authorities warned the public against using this medicine outside clinical trials, the medicine was widely used on a major scale in late 2020 and in 2021. It is also being promoted as a low-cost medicine via social media, but there is no clinical evidence to confirm that ivermectin is an effective treatment of COVID-19. In scientific literature, we find reports of serious side effects such as reduced blood pressure, confusion and hallucinations. In some cases, it can even lead to coma or death.

Large quantities of counterfeit ivermectin tablets have been intercepted in Belgium over the past three years. In 2021, a total of 12 529 counterfeit ivermectin tablets originating from postal packages were seized. Significant amounts were also seized in 2022 (5 772 units) and in 2023 (5 129 units).

The seized counterfeit tablets were analysed by Sciensano and found to contain serious quality problems:

- the majority of the tablets (65 %) were systematically underdosed, in other words, the quantities of active pharmaceutical ingredients present were too low;
- a large number of tablets (46 %) were severely contaminated with bacteria and some samples were even contaminated with bacteria known to cause gastrointestinal diseases when taken orally.

In addition to the immediate risks of self-medicating with such a product, the improper use and incorrect dosing of ivermectin can also cause parasite resistance. This may have adverse public health implications, especially since the number of newly developed active pharmaceutical ingredients that can be safely used to control parasites is quite scarce.

The FAMHP and Sciensano recommend that illegal ivermectin tablets should no longer be used as there are no guarantees about their safety, quality and efficacy. These illegal medicines are mostly sold through foreign online shops or online marketplaces.

Always seek medical advice from your doctor and only buy your medicines from a pharmacist. Pharmacies that sell medicines online must display the European logo for Internet pharmacies on every page of their website. A simple click on this logo will lead visitors to the [list of internet pharmacies registered with the FAMHP](#).

Do you have doubts about a website or a medicine? Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about it and notify the FAMHP!

For more information

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