

On October 4th, as part of Pangea 2012, over 120,000 fake medicines in tablet and capsule form were seized in Ireland, highlighting how prolific the online illegal medicines business is.

Customs, Gardaí and the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) joined forces in a week-long operation and the fake medication with an estimated street value of €375,000 was confiscated. Eleven searches were conducted by Gardaí and four suspected suppliers were arrested. The seizures were part of an international Interpol crackdown, Operation Pangea, which has been running for five years.

The global operation saw packages being inspected by regulators and customs on an international scale and the global haul was over €8m worth of products, in 100 countries, with over 18,000 online pharmacy websites being shut down.

The Director of Compliance at the IMB, John Lynch, said "Counterfeit and illegal medicines pose a serious and potentially fatal threat to public health." He added that "In addition to this international effort, this is an area of an on-going focus for the IMB's enforcement team all year round."

"The IMB strongly advises consumers not to purchase medicines through any unauthorised sources as there can be no guarantee that they are genuine or safe. Some of these medicines have been shown to contain too little or too much of the active ingredient while others contain the wrong active ingredient altogether.

"As a result, there is a very real danger that these medicines will actually damage the health of those who use them. Furthermore, criminal networks are behind many of the activities related to the online sale of counterfeit medicines so purchasers may also be exposing themselves to potential credit card fraud and identity theft when handing over their personal details via these sites."

The sale of prescription-only medicines by post or via the internet is prohibited under Irish law. The IMB, Gardaí and Customs Officials diligently monitor and investigate suspected instances of illegal supply of medicines via the internet and rigorously enforce the law in this area.

According to the IMB, products confiscated in this latest operation included weight loss tablets, antibiotics, erectile dysfunction tablets and capsules, anti-depressants, pain killers, cardiac medication, hormones and steroid products, cholesterol lowering medication, cancer medication, stimulants/amphetamines and insulin.