

Fake Covid-19 vaccines found in Mexico and Poland

Pharma company Pfizer identifies fake doses of a substance sold under the company's brand

Pfizer has identified counterfeit versions of its Covid-19 vaccine in Mexico and Poland, the pharmaceutical company has revealed.

The US pharma corporation said that the doses were seized by authorities in the two countries and confirmed to be fake by tests.

Pfizer revealed that the doses had false labels in Mexico, while in Poland, the substance was believed to be anti-wrinkle treatment.

According to the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), the counterfeit doses were seized by authorities in separate investigations in the two countries.

At a Mexican clinic, around 80 people received a fake version of the drug, which appeared to have been physically harmless but offered no protection against the virus.

In Poland, authorities said no one had received counterfeit doses seized at a man's apartment.

High demand and profit potential

Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler's Geoff Potter said, "Injectable medications, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices of all types are frequently counterfeited. Given the high demand and profit potential, there was never any question among brand protection professionals that Covid vaccines would also be counterfeited.

"A fake vaccine vial and label are simple to create from scratch. However, a lazy counterfeiter can purchase them ready made. Until recently, used Covid vaccine vials retrieved from trash could be purchased in bulk on eBay. Simply refilling them with water would make a difficult to detect counterfeit."

He added, "Any government, healthcare provider, or patient that goes outside of the authorized chain of distribution to obtain a Covid vaccine is taking an inappropriate risk of ending up with a counterfeit."

"This conduct is unquestionably criminal. But manufacturers don't have to depend on the government to protect themselves against domestic counterfeiting: Congress has created powerful civil remedies for counterfeiting under the Lanham Act, which private businesses can use proactively to investigate



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and shut down counterfeiting schemes like these, both quickly and cost-effectively.”

Falsified products

The World Health Organization's director

general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in March that the organisation was “concerned” about the potential for criminal groups to “exploit the huge global unmet demand for vaccines”.

He stated, “A number of ministries of health, national regulatory authorities and public procurement organizations have received suspicious offers to supply Covid-19 vaccines. We are also aware of vaccines being diverted and reintroduced into the supply chain, with no guarantee that cold chain has been maintained.”

He concluded, “Some falsified products are also being sold as vaccines on the internet, especially on the dark web, and we are aware of other reports of corruption and re-use of empty vaccine vials.

“We urge the secure disposal or destruction of used and empty vaccine vials to prevent them from being reused by criminal groups. And we urge all people not to buy vaccines outside government-run vaccination programmes.”

Catherine White is section editor at *IPM*.