



THE INVESTIGATOR

Counterfeit Vaccines and Organized Crime



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Multiple COVID-19 vaccines from firms including Pfizer and Moderna have proven highly effective and are set to be distributed in massive quantities over the coming months once approved by regulators. But, as if obtaining, storing, and distributing millions of doses wasn't challenging enough, countries around the world will likely need to overcome yet another hurdle: organized crime. [INTERPOL](#) has issued a global alert to law enforcement across its 194 member countries warning them to prepare for organized crime networks targeting COVID-19 vaccines, both physically and online. "As governments are preparing to roll out vaccines, criminal organizations are planning to infiltrate or disrupt supply chains." Jürgen Stock, INTERPOL Secretary General.

The INTERPOL Orange Notice outlines potential criminal activity in relation to the falsification, theft and illegal advertising of COVID-19 and flu vaccines, with the pandemic having already triggered unprecedented opportunistic and predatory criminal behaviour. As a number of COVID-19 vaccines come closer to approval and global distribution, ensuring the safety of the supply chain and identifying illicit websites selling fake products will be essential. The need for coordination between law enforcement and health regulatory bodies will also play a vital role to ensure the safety of individuals and well-being of communities are protected. "It is essential that law enforcement is as prepared as possible for what will be an onslaught of all types of criminal activity linked to the COVID-19 vaccine, which is why INTERPOL has issued this global warning," concluded Secretary General Stock.

Criminal groups have already attempted to take advantage of the pandemic, hoarding supplies of personal protective equipment in some instances, Interpol said, or illegally selling medicines online. The agency had already in July warned about the proliferation of fake COVID-19 testing kits and other medical products as countries worldwide rushed to secure supplies during the pandemic. In addition to the dangers of ordering potentially life-threatening products, an analysis by the INTERPOL's Cybercrime Unit revealed that of 3,000 websites associated with online pharmacies suspected of selling illicit medicines and medical devices, around 1,700 contained cyber threats, especially phishing and spamming malware.



Here are some [tips](#) to identify false vaccine offers:

- **Research carefully:** Scammers are very creative, so be skeptical of anything that seems too good – or crazy – to be true. Double check any information about the vaccine with official news sources. And be aware that none of the vaccines can be currently purchased online or in stores.
- **Check with your doctor:** If you want a vaccine early, reach out to your healthcare provider about your options. If you don't have a primary care physician, check out the official website of your local health department for more information
- **Ignore calls for immediate action.** While you may want to be first in line for the vaccine, don't let that sense of urgency cloud your judgment. Scammers try to get you to act before you think. Don't fall for it.
- **Think the link may be real? Double check the URL.** Scammers often buy official-looking URLs to use in their cons. Be careful that the link is really what it pretends to be. If the message alleges to come from the local government, make sure the URL ends in .gov (for the United States) or .ca (for Canada). When in doubt, perform a separate internet search for the website.

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