

Counterfeit and Adulterated Drugs

Drugs that are obtained illegally for abuse purposes are not always what they seem to be. According to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), they may be “counterfeit” (contain the drug specified but not made legally), “mimics” (contain one or more controlled substances other than the intended drug) or “fakes” (contain no controlled substances). Cases presenting to EMS providers and emergency departments with adulterated drugs are problematic in that signs and symptoms don't correlate with the history. In many cases, toxscreens won't confirm the presence or absence of the drugs involved.

The Maryland Poison Center (MPC) is often consulted when adulterated drugs are suspected. In 2006, there were many overdose cases in Maryland and in other states when illicitly manufactured fentanyl was sold as heroin, resulting in serious effects and deaths. The MPC was instrumental in notifying hospitals, EMS and law enforcement agencies about the potential for overdoses.

According to the DEA (*Drug Enforcement Administration's Microgram Bulletin, January 2007*), there have been recent reports of tablets mimicking Quaaludes (methaqualone) in southern Maryland and elsewhere in the United States. Quaalude is a Schedule I controlled sedative-hypnotic substance that was removed from the market in 1983. **The Lemmon 714 “Quaalude” tablet (pictured)**



is the most illicitly replicated pharmaceutical drug in the the DEA's history. Virtually all of the samples analyzed by the DEA since the 1990's have contained varying amounts of diazepam, in quantities as high as 300 mg.

Counterfeit drugs are also encountered when purchasing “brand name” drugs over the Internet or when importing medications from other countries. On February 16, 2007, the FDA alerted us that some Ambien, Xanax, Lexapro and Ativan products sold over several internet sites actually contained haloperidol. Several patients sought emergency medical treatment for difficulty in breathing and muscle spasms. Herbal and dietary supplements are also often adulterated with other drugs, sometimes containing prescription drugs not listed on the label. Some of these undisclosed drugs can result in toxicity from high doses or drug interactions. Report all cases of suspected adulterated drugs to the Maryland Poison Center and the FDA or DEA.

DID YOU KNOW THAT... there is a nationwide shortage of pyridoxine injection?

Pyridoxine injection, also known as vitamin B6, is used as an antidote for isoniazid overdoses, as well as having other medical uses. According to the manufacturer, the shortage is a result of increased demand for the product. There is no estimate when supplies will be available, and there are no emergency supplies. If pyridoxine is not available, benzodiazepines may be used to treat isoniazid-induced seizures. Healthcare professionals should consult the Maryland Poison Center (1-800-222-1222) for specific management strategies.



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If you do not wish to receive faxes or emails from the Maryland Poison Center, call 410.706.7604 or circle your fax number and fax this back to 410.706.7184. Supported by Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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