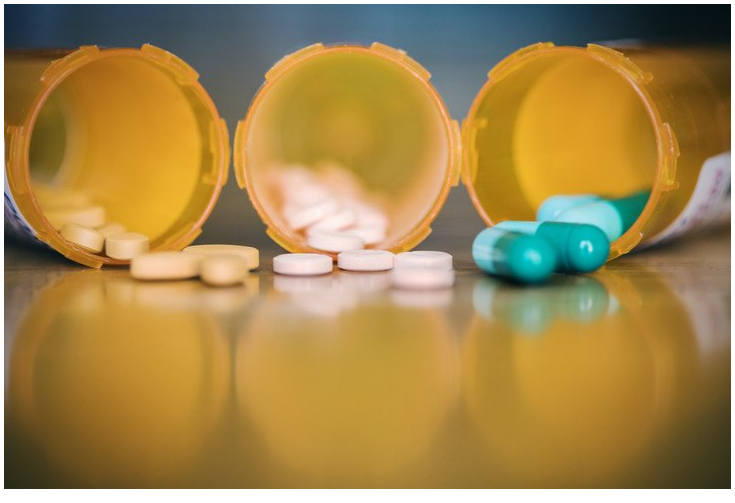
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WHO issues warning on falsified medicines used for diabetes treatment and weight loss

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Alert addresses 3 falsified batches of product of semaglutide class of medicines



The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a medical product alert on falsified semaglutides, the type of medicines that are used for treatment of type 2 diabetes and obesity in some countries.

The alert addresses 3 falsified batches of product of semaglutide class of medicines (of specific brand Ozempic), which have been detected in Brazil in October 2023, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in October 2023, and the United States of America in December 2023.

WHO Global Surveillance and Monitoring System (GSMS) has been observing increased reports on falsified semaglutide products in all geographical regions since 2022. This is the first official notice issued by WHO after confirmation of some of the reports.

“WHO advises healthcare professionals, regulatory authorities and the public be aware of these falsified batches of medicines,” said Dr Yukiko Nakatani, WHO Assistant Director-General for Access to Medicines and Health Products. “We call on stakeholders to stop any usage of suspicious medicines and report to relevant authorities”.

Semaglutides are not part of WHO-recommended treatments for diabetes management due to their current high cost. The cost barrier makes these products unsuitable for a public health approach, which aims to ensure the widest possible access to medicines at the population level and to strike a balance between the best-established standard of care and what is feasible on a large scale in resource-limited settings. Also, there are more affordable treatments available for diabetes, with similar effects to those of semaglutides on blood sugar and cardiovascular risk.

WHO is currently working on a rapid advice guideline on possible use of GLP-1 RAs, including semaglutides, for treatment of obesity in adults and as part of a more comprehensive model of care. The term GLP-1 RAs stands for glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists, which include semaglutides, for a class of medicines used for diabetes treatment to lower blood sugar and support weight loss.