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from the Federal Agency for Medicines and Health Products (FAMHP)

### Medicines via the Internet? Don't surf with your health! Launching the first FAMHP information campaign

[www.medicaments-par-internet.be](http://www.medicaments-par-internet.be)  
[www.geneesmiddelen-via-internet.be](http://www.geneesmiddelen-via-internet.be)

On Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2009 The Federal Agency for Medicines and Health Products (FAMHP) launched, with the support of Ms. Laurette Onkelinx, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Public Health, its first major information campaign:

#### “Medicines via the Internet? Don't surf with your health!”

The purpose of the Agency's campaign is to make members of the general public aware of the possible health risks they expose themselves to when buying medicines via the Internet outside the legal channels. The Internet provides an immense amount of information, advertisements and recommendations with regard to medicines, but all of this should be approached with the greatest caution. For example, Spam often leads internet users to illegal sites where medicines can be bought, which in the majority of cases are counterfeit or fakes.

In many cases it is difficult for the authorities to identify the persons responsible for these sites in order to put an end to their illegal activities. *“It is therefore necessary”,* underlines Laurette Onkelinx, *“that citizens are warned of the risks they are exposing their health to when buying medicines via the Internet and not via an authorised pharmacy in Belgium, nor via this pharmacy's internet site in case of non-prescription medicines. The internet sites for the sale of medicines via the internet, which depend on authorised pharmacies in Belgium, have to be registered with the FAMHP and the Pharmacists' Association [Ordre des Pharmaciens/Orde van Apothekers].”*



Moreover, it is important that people are reminded of the essential role that the doctor and the pharmacist play in the correct use of medicines.

*“We have a monitoring role, which reflects our more repressive side, and we lead the fight against illegal practices since we are the authority responsible for the quality, safety and efficacy of medicines, but we also have the task of informing patients and the general public in order to guarantee the safe and proper use of medicines”,* explained Xavier De Cuyper, CEO of the FAMHP, this afternoon at the launch of the campaign. *“Therefore we have opted for a campaign whose objective is to inform the citizens and warn them of the risks they expose themselves to, so that they can adopt the right attitude to protect their health.”*

The campaign sends a clear message: “Medicines via the Internet? Don't surf with your health!” On the one hand it uses a strong, well-known symbol that inspires confidence, namely the Bowl of Hygieia. A pharmacist is indeed best suited to advise on the correct use of medicines and he/she also ensures the quality of the medicines that he/she supplies.



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and Health Products

On the other hand the campaign uses the ambivalent image of the snake, as it can also represent a potential danger. Since one is not sure about its nature and behaviour, it is better to keep a safe distance. The same goes for an unknown supplier of medicines via the internet, whose identity and intentions are not known and who therefore is as dangerous as an aggressive snake.

This campaign will be circulated from today over the whole country and will run for one month. Banners appearing on internet sites and on MSN, posters in fitness centres and in universities, as well as advertisements in the Metro newspaper refer to the campaign site:

[www.medicaments-par-internet.be](http://www.medicaments-par-internet.be) - [www.geneesmiddelen-via-internet.be](http://www.geneesmiddelen-via-internet.be).

On this site the general public can test its knowledge about the purchase of medicines via the internet, get good advice on this subject and download the campaign flyer.

More information see: [www.fagg-afmps.be](http://www.fagg-afmps.be)

- Royal Decree of 21st January 2009 concerning instructions for pharmacists.
- FAMHP circular letter no. 536 for the attention of pharmacies open to the public.
- A section on Medicines and the Internet.

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**The Federal Agency for Medicines and Health Products (FAMHP) is the competent authority responsible for medicines and health products.**

**In the interest of public health the FAMHP ensures the quality, safety and efficacy of medicines and health products in clinical development and on the market.**