

# What You Need to Know About Medicines, Pharmacies and Safety in Kenya

## 1. Generic vs. Original (Branded) Medicines

### Q: What is the difference between generic and original medicine?

An original (innovator) medicine is the first version developed by a research company. A generic medicine contains the same active ingredient and is produced after the patent of the original expires.

### Q: Are generic medicines safe and effective?

Yes. For approval, a generic medicine must be **bioequivalent** to the original. This means it delivers the same amount of active ingredient into the bloodstream at the same rate. It is just as safe and effective.

### Q: Why are generic medicines cheaper?

Generic manufacturers do not incur the high costs of research and marketing, which makes them more affordable.

## 2. Quackery, Unlicensed Pharmacies and Illegal Sale of Medicines

### Q: Why are medicines sold in kiosks and dukas?

Selling prescription medicines outside a registered pharmacy is illegal. Only a **qualified and licensed pharmacist or pharmaceutical technologist** is authorised to dispense such medicines. However, a few low-risk medicines may be sold as general sale medicines.

### Q: How can I confirm if a pharmacy is licensed?

Licensed pharmacies must display:

- A Premises Registration Certificate
- A valid practice licence of the pharmacist or pharmaceutical technologist

You can also:

- Scan the QR code on the licence
- Verify online  
via: <https://practice.pharmacyboardkenya.org/LicenseStatus?register=facilities>

### Q: What is being done about illegal operators (“quacks”)?

The Board conducts routine and targeted inspections, including working with police through “mystery shopper” operations and seizures.

**Technology and rapid response teams are also being used for unannounced inspections.**

**The public is encouraged to report illegal sellers to the nearest police station or PPB office.**

**Q: Is it allowed to mix human and animal medicines in one shop?**

No. Selling human medicines alongside veterinary drugs or pesticides is illegal and poses serious health risks. Such cases should be reported immediately.

### **3. Prescriptions, Dispensing Errors and Expired Medicines**

**Q: What should I do if I receive the wrong or expired medicine?**

This is a serious violation. You should:

- Not take the medicine
- Keep the medicine, packaging and receipt
- Report the case to PPB immediately

The Board can investigate, impose penalties and suspend licences.

**Q: Who is allowed to prescribe medicines?**

Only a **qualified doctor, dentist or registered clinical officer** can prescribe prescription medicines.

A qualified pharmacist may also assess and provide certain treatments within their scope, with proper records.

**Q: Who is allowed to dispense medicines?**

Only a **registered pharmacist or pharmaceutical technologist** can dispense medicines.

A nurse cannot run a pharmacy but may administer medicines under prescription in a clinical setting.

### **4. Drug Abuse (Artane, “Blue Pills” and “Mchele”)**

**Q: What are the “blue pills” and why are they being abused?**

Some prescription medicines are misused for their effects. For example, **Artane (trihexyphenidyl)**—used to treat movement disorders—is being abused for its hallucinogenic effects.

**Q: What is being done about this?**

It is illegal to sell such medicines without a valid prescription. The Board is working with **NACADA and law enforcement** to crack down on illegal supply.

**Q: What should I do if I suspect I have been drugged (“Mchele”)?**

- Seek immediate medical attention
- Report the incident to the police

This is a criminal offence and a serious health risk.

## **5. Online Adverts, Scams and Self-Medication**

### **Q: Are medicines advertised on social media legitimate?**

Be cautious. Medicines advertised on platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp—especially those claiming to cure serious conditions—are likely scams. These products are often unregistered, counterfeit or dangerous.

### **Q: Is it safe to buy medicines online?**

Only purchase medicines from licensed and verified sources. Unregulated online sales pose serious health risks.

### **Q: Is self-medication safe?**

No. Self-medication can lead to:

- Wrong diagnosis
- Incorrect dosage
- Dangerous drug interactions

Always seek professional medical advice.

## **6. Medical Advice and Public Responsibility**

### **Q: Can I get medical advice online for my condition?**

For personal health concerns, always visit a **qualified healthcare provider or health facility** for proper diagnosis and treatment.

### **Key Reminders**

- Verify your pharmacy and medicines
- Report illegal sellers and unsafe practices to PPB
- Do not use expired or unverified medicines
- Never self-medicate with prescription drugs