BEUC The European Consumer Organisation

Press Release

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Beefed-up role for European Medicines Agency to reduce risk of medicine shortages

The European Parliament and EU Member States have struck a deal to strengthen the role of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in crisis management, after the COVID-19 pandemic caused severe shortages of medicines and medical equipment.

Health systems struggled to deal with a wave of patients suffering from COVID-19 in the early stage of the pandemic when there was a short supply of muscle relaxants, sedatives and pain-killing medicines in many hospital intensive care units. EU countries set up ad-hoc systems to better coordinate the flow of medicines between themselves and cooperated in solving shortages. Today's agreement creates a more formal structure for this coordination and cooperation that should benefit consumers and patients in the long run.

The EMA will coordinate EU countries in more systematically monitoring the supply and demand of medicines and medicinal devices and cooperating to avoid shortages during crisis situations. Clinical trial organisers will also come under greater scrutiny and pressure to publish their summary results earlier than is currently required, one year in most cases. This in turn will help speed up research in new medicines.

Monique Goyens, Director General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), said: "Consumers and patients will be better off after today's agreement which should lead to faster and better coordination in the EU to solve medicine shortages. In the early stage of the pandemic, hospitals suffered from medicine shortages and found it hard to treat the huge wave of patients who needed care. At the same time, there weren't enough masks to protect consumers. The EMA will now have a big role to play in keeping medicines flowing and making sure they reach the people who need them."

ENDS

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