BEUC The European Consumer Organisation

Press Release

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Campaign to limit medicine shortages gets boost with new European Medicines Agency role

Europeans are likely to be better protected from medicine shortages during health crises after the EU Parliament approved legislation that gives the European Medicines Agency (EMA) a new, beefed-up role.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused severe shortages in hospital intensive care units of medical equipment and medicines, such as muscle relaxants, sedatives and painkillers at the worst point in the pandemic.

The new legislation should better shield Europeans from medicine shortages by requiring the EMA's coordination of EU countries in systematically monitoring the supply and demand of critical medicines and medical devices. The EMA will also push governments to cooperate to avoid shortages during crisis situations. Clinical trial organisers will also come under greater scrutiny and pressure to publish their summary results earlier, which will help speed up research in new medicines.

But the EU needs to make deeper changes to pharmaceutical legislation, which the Commission is planning later this year, for the threat of medicine shortages to recede.

Monique Goyens, Director General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), said: "Without doubt, the legislation approved is a step in the right direction. This new role for the European Medicines Agency will lead to faster and better coordination in the EU to prevent and mitigate medicine shortages during crises. But to solve everyday medicine shortages, we need deeper action to tackle supply-side problems and require more from the pharmaceutical industry, such as an obligation to maintain adequate safety stocks of medicines. The Commission must put consumers' and patients' needs first when it rolls out its new pharma legislation later this year."

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