
Headline: ASPA released its latest Report to the Nation "Substandard and falsified medical products, learning from COVID-19 Pandemic and Technological tools to ensure medicines & patient safety."

- *The Report highlights the trends in pharmaceutical crime & incidents of sub-standard and falsified (SF) medical products during COVID-19 and recommendations to combat it.*
- *Incidents of Substandard and falsified (SF) medical products noted an increase of 47% from 2020 (91) to 2021 (134) during 2020 and 2021.*
- *Incidents of SF of COVID-19 products were observed in 23 out of 29 States & 7 Union Territories in India.*
- *The Report welcomes the Government of India's decision to make QR Codes mandatory on Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) and recommend taking a comprehensive approach to building an authentication ecosystem in the country.*

New Delhi, March 28, 2022; The menace of substandard and falsified (SF) medical products is not new; unfortunately, the issue is still undervalued and undertreated. Counterfeiting and illicit trade plague all industries, but pharmaceuticals and healthcare are among the most prominent victims, especially when there is a matter of life and death.

Authentication Solutions Providers' Association (ASPA) has studied the major counterfeit incident noticed during the COVID-19 period and its impact in the country and released its latest Report to the Nation. Titled "**Substandard and falsified medical products, learning from COVID-19 Pandemic and Technological tools to ensure medicines & patient safety**", the Report highlights the trends on pharmaceutical crime & incidents of SF medical products that happened during COVID-19 and recommendations to combat it. The Report also welcomes the Government of India's decision to make QR Codes mandatory on Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs); however, it suggested a comprehensive approach towards building an authentication ecosystem in the country.

The study found that **fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, incidents of sub-standard and falsified (SF) medical products increased by almost 47% from 2020 to 2021.** The noticed incidents were majorly related to COVID-19 related medical products, including Vaccines, Medicines, COVID Test

Kits, Anti-Biotics, Face Masks and Sanitizers. During the COVID-19 peak, incidents of SF medical were observed in 23 out of 29 States and 7 Union Territories of India.

On the other hand, SF products are impacting every products sector, and the incidents of counterfeiting in India have risen with a 20% growth from January 2018 to December 2020. Globally also, Pharmaceutical SF incidents rose 111% over the past ten years, derailing global efforts to fight life-threatening disease & to achieve its sustainability goals "Right to Health.

Talking about the Report, **Mr. Nakul Pasricha, President, Authentication Solution Providers' Association (ASPA)**, said, "Criminals have seen the pandemic crisis as an opportunity to sell more and more substandard and falsified medical products, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the people in need. The tremendous adverse impact of the huge increase in circulation of spurious medicine and medical essentials on the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic has almost gone unnoticed. It is unfortunate as criminals produce ineffective or harmful products in packaging that appear identical to genuine products to make them difficult to detect. The circulation and use of these SF medical products violate the Right to Health and slows down the pace of providing quality health services that people deserve. It is high time for firm action to curb this menace. If preventive steps are taken now, we will be better positioned to deliver effective healthcare to patients."

Despite guidelines, the circulation of SF medical products has been an under-addressed/ under-tackled issue. The recent decision to make QR Codes mandatory on Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) is a significant step towards initiating a positive change in the ecosystem. APIs are the primary raw materials used in making medicines – capsules, tablets, syrups & others. Enforcing the mandate on APIs is the right starting point. The consumer will be the ultimate winner due because of this step as it will have a significant impact in making the supply chain more secure and protecting the quality of medicines. This step will be instrumental in distinguishing spurious and original drugs and make the ecosystem less vulnerable to substandard and falsified products. National authentication and traceability projects have been trending internationally for last few years, with China, Brazil, Turkey, the USA, and the EU pioneers in this area. It has helped these countries reduce the shadow market in various industries, improved tax collection, and significantly reduced losses incurred by businesses from counterfeit products and illegal trade. India should also implement these measures in other sectors to join the league of advanced digital economies.