

Public Policy Position

IMPORTATION OF MEDICINES

In an effort to reduce prescription drug costs, some Americans import their medicines from other countries. Some state and local governments have encouraged this practice.

Merck opposes drug importation and supports current U.S. law that makes the practice illegal. Merck believes that drug importation would compromise public trust in the manufacture and distribution of our high-quality medicines. The FDA has intercepted counterfeit or adulterated medicines on their way to the United States. This is a serious matter both to patients who rely on the safety of their medicines and to companies that invest significantly to ensure the consistent quality and safety of their medicines.

Widespread importation practices would also reduce the incentives necessary to ensure continued investment in the high-risk research and development that leads to new medicines. When importing drugs from other countries, we are importing their price controls as well. These practices often artificially lower prices below a level that represents their value in treating and preventing disease. Where this occurs, it reduces the incentives for research into and the development of breakthrough medicines. In its "[Report on Prescription Drug Importation](#)," the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Drug Importation Task Force found that importation would harm pharmaceutical innovation, reducing the number of new medicines by an estimated four to 18 drugs over a decade.

Importation is a response to the access barriers that arise from a lack of prescription drug coverage. The answer is not to allow importation but, instead, to expand access. Merck supports health reform that would increase access to health insurance for the uninsured and which would provide lower-priced access to prescription drugs in the U.S. Recognizing that a large percentage of those without prescription drug coverage are seniors, Merck supported the Medicare prescription drug benefit, which uses market competition to bring low, negotiated, U.S. prices to Medicare consumers.

Merck also provides safe and affordable alternatives to importation that will assist patients without drug coverage in obtaining their medicines. For 50 years, the Merck Patient Assistance Program has provided free Merck medicines to millions of Americans with no prescription drug coverage. Merck also offers discounts on our medicines through the Merck Prescription Discount Program for the Uninsured. There is no need for any American to accept the risks associated with importation in order to receive a Merck medicine.

For more information on how [Merck helps](#) patients get the Merck medicines they need, including the Merck's Patient Assistance Program and the Merck Drug Discount Program for the Uninsured:

Merck's Patient Assistance Program: <http://www.merck.com/merckhelps/patientassistance/home.html> or call a toll-free number for patients, 1-800-727-5400

Merck Prescription Discount Program for the Uninsured: www.merckuninsured.com or call a toll-free number for patients 1-800-50 MERCK (1-800-506-3725)