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## **OLAF warns against fraudsters offering COVID-19 vaccines**

**The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has warned governments to be on their guard against offers to provide them with COVID-19 vaccines. These offers are very often fake, and should be reported.**

**Ville Itälä**, Director-General of OLAF, said: *"We are hearing reports of fraudsters offering to sell vaccines to governments across the EU. These offers come in many different forms. For example, fraudsters may offer to sell large quantities of vaccines, deliver a sample in order to pocket the first advance payment and then vanish with the money. They may deliver batches of fake vaccines. Or they falsely may purport to represent legitimate business and claim to be in the possession of or have access to vaccines.*

*All of these claims have one thing in common: they are false. They are hoaxes organised to defraud national authorities looking to step up the pace of vaccination to keep their citizens safe. They must be stopped as quickly as possible.*

*That is why OLAF has added an extra layer to our ongoing inquiry into fake COVID -19 protection products, with the aim of tackling an illicit trade of COVID-19 vaccines possibly carried out by illegally importing them into the EU territory and/or through the marketing of counterfeit medicines. We will now actively share information we receive about these attempted frauds with our trusted partners in the EU, in the Member States and across the world. We will be working together with them to thwart these scams and to help enforcement services determine the true identity of the individuals and companies behind these attempts which put at risk human health and public finances at a time of great hardship."*

### **Background**

On 19 March 2020 the European Anti-Fraud Office [opened an official inquiry](#) into the illicit trade of face masks, medical devices, disinfectants, sanitisers, medicines and test kits linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, OLAF's investigation has led to the identification of over 1,000 suspicious operators and to the seizure or detention of over 14 million items. These include, for example, units of hand sanitizers containing a high volume of methanol, substandard face masks and fake test kits. No seizures of fake vaccines have been recorded as yet.

### **OLAF mission, mandate and competences:**

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

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