



Pharmaceuticals in the environment

Our Haleon position



Background

Pharmaceutical ingredients can enter the environment at various stages of their lifecycle, including manufacturing, use and disposal. Pharmaceutical ingredients being found in waterways, like rivers and lakes, is commonly referred to as 'Pharmaceuticals in the Environment' (PiE). The topic of PiE refers to the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) which are responsible for producing the relevant health effects in medicines.

How pharmaceuticals can enter the environment

The major source of APIs entering the environment is via patient excretion or washing off an API into the water following use of a medicine. APIs can also enter the environment as emissions during the manufacture of medicines and from the incorrect disposal of unused or expired medicines.ⁱ Pharmaceutical ingredients are a subset of the known micropollutants found in our environment.

PiE is a growing challenge as the world's population ages and our use of medicines increases. However, in contrast to many other substances found in the environment, medicines play an important role in human health. This means the issue of PiE requires a balanced approach.

The essential role of medicines

Medicines play an important role in healthcare systems around the world. Non-prescription medicines are trusted by millions of people for their everyday health needs, saving healthcare resources and freeing up time for primary care practitioners to attend to patients with conditions that are more difficult to treat.

Therefore, the challenge of PiE should not be tackled by restricting access to medicines. This could have significant consequences on the quality of life of millions of people who live every day with common health conditions such as pain, allergies, and digestive conditions. It could also lead to additional burden on already stretched health systems.ⁱⁱ

Minimising the impact of PiE

Effective solutions require close and long-term collaboration between multiple parties including: governments; healthcare companies, water treatment providers and other industries; as well as the support of everyone in society to address this complex issue, together.

Governments and industry should work together on accelerating the implementation of innovative water treatment solutions and upgrading water treatment systems to help tackle the issue of micropollutants broadly beyond pharmaceuticals. Together with society, governments and industry should also work together on educating consumers about responsible use and disposal of medicines.

Haleon's position on PiE

At Haleon we recognise that people's health and the health of the planet are intrinsically linked. Therefore, our commitment to deliver better everyday health with humanity means ensuring that more people have access to trusted products, as well as doing our part to minimise the impact of our products and their ingredients on the environment.

Our actions on PiE

We are committed to playing our part in tackling the issue of PiE across all phases of our products' lifecycle and beyond. We are also committed to partnering with governments, non-governmental institutions and the healthcare and water industries to drive education and action on responsible use and disposal of medicines, and to further accelerate innovation across all concerned sectors.

As Haleon, we are taking active steps across three areas: product, people and planet:

1. PRODUCT

We have upgraded our own wastewater treatment plants around the world to remove micropollutants created during the manufacturing stage before wastewater enters the public water system. We are also introducing new forms of products, such as patches. Our adhesive transdermal patches are technically designed to deliver the active ingredient through the skin without any hand contact, which should reduce the amount of active ingredient that may enter the water system.

2. PEOPLE

We educate people on the responsible use of our medicines to ensure they use the right amount when it is really needed. This includes updating instructions for use in our Patient Information Leaflets; and our **"Let's treat it right"** educational campaign for consumers and healthcare professionals. This campaign provides support and guidance for people on how to use non-prescription pain medicines responsibly and confidently, as well as how to correctly store and dispose of them.

We also encourage people using pain medicines applied to the skin to wipe their hands using a paper towel before washing them: our studies have shown this simple step significantly reduces the amount of medicine that enters the waterⁱⁱⁱ.

We are also participants in industry-wide education efforts to ensure proper use and disposal of medicines. For example, we are active participants in **KnowYourOTCs** in the United States, and **MedsDisposal** in Europe.

3. PLANET

We are committed to better understanding the challenge of PiE and are actively collaborating with others in industry to assess and characterise the potential environmental risks of different pharmaceuticals. For example, we are sponsors of the **Trial Reservoir**, an incubator fund for innovation in clean water, and we are partnering with the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) to explore multi-stakeholder joint solutions to the challenge of PiE.

We are also actively engaged in industry discussions on extended producer responsibility (EPR). We support EPR schemes which are well-designed: based on the principles of fairness and inclusivity; and where monies raised are reinvested into solving environmental infrastructure issues.

Policy recommendations

We believe that governments, policymakers, health systems, regulators, industry, trade associations, healthcare professionals and citizens should work together to:

- Ensure that policies introduced to tackle PiE do not restrict patient access to medicines;
- Educate patients on the responsible use of medicines to minimise the amount of pharmaceuticals entering the environment; and
- Support sustainable and innovative solutions to pharmaceuticals (and other micropollutants) in the environment by upgrading wastewater treatment plants and promoting novel innovative wastewater treatment technology.

*For more information on how we engage policymakers, please see our position on **Political advocacy**.*

ⁱ Pharmaceuticals in the Environment (PIE). *EFPIA*. Available to access: <https://www.efpia.eu/about-medicines/development-of-medicines/regulations-safety-supply/pharmaceuticals-in-the-environment-pie/>

ⁱⁱ COVID-19 prompts increased focus on self-care, with Europeans taking their health more seriously to relieve pressure on healthcare systems. GSK (2020) Available here: <https://www.gsk.com/en-gb/media/press-releases/covid-19-prompts-increased-focus-on-self-care-with-europeans-taking-their-health-more-seriously-to-relieve-pressure-on-healthcare-systems/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Reduction of residual topical diclofenac in waste water by a wiping procedure before handwashing. Bielfeldt et al. (2022) Available here: [Reduction of residual topical diclofenac in waste water by a wiping procedure before hand washing - ScienceDirect](#)