

Interested parties can access the lists of recommended INNs and the lists of stems both in printed and electronic form. The WHO - INN Programme web page furthermore provides information for applicants wishing to submit a request for an INN for a new pharmaceutical substance (<http://www.who.int/medicines/edmtopics>).



The INN Programme also offers an electronic information service via MedNet that provides access to the INN database. In order to obtain access, interested parties can connect to <http://mednet.who.int>, subscribe to the online system and request access to the MedNet INN service.



**WHO International Nonproprietary Names  
for Pharmaceutical Substances**

## **Information leaflet for Trademark Departments**

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***For additional information  
it is possible to contact:***

### **The INN Programme**

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An International Nonproprietary Name (INN) identifies a pharmaceutical substance or active pharmaceutical ingredient by a unique name that is globally recognized and is public property. The system of recommended International Nonproprietary Names was initiated in 1950 by a World Health Assembly resolution (WHA 3.11), and has been in operation since 1953. It is aimed at providing health professionals with a clear mechanism of identification for the safe prescription and dispensing of medicines to patients, and to allow health professionals and scientists worldwide to communicate and exchange

information in an unambiguous manner. INNs have now been recommended for nearly 8000 substances and are used widely by health professionals, drug regulatory bodies, scientists and the pharmaceutical industry. INNs are available in all six official languages of WHO (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) and in Latin. They are also translated into many other languages for use at the national level by regulatory authorities, as well as in reference books and in medical literature.



As noted above, INNs are available for use by all for the sole purpose of uniquely identifying the corresponding pharmaceutical substance. In this respect, WHO encourages manufacturers to use INNs in conjunction with their corporate name to designate their products.



Usually pharmaceutical preparations are also marketed by industry under proprietary names or trademarks ("TMs"). However, the existence of both an INN (in which no party can claim proprietary rights) and a (proprietary) TM for the same pharmaceutical substance sometimes leads to conflict. This may occur when a new INN is selected, but also when Intellectual

Property departments or pharmaceutical companies introduce a proposed trademark for a new pharmaceutical product. Better understanding of the purpose and use of INNs may help in avoiding such situations that are in conflict with an INN.



The selection of new INNs necessitates the use of appropriate safeguards to avoid a conflict with established trademarks. When selecting new INNs, the INN Expert Group convened by WHO for this purpose generally rejects any proposal that could result in a conflict with known TMs. Selected names are published in a WHO periodical ("WHO Drug Information") as proposed INNs before they are actually adopted as recommended INNs. Interested parties are given a period of 4 months in which to raise an objection to a proposed INN. An objection may be based, for example, on similarity between the proposed INN and a trademark in which the interested party has proprietary rights.



To safeguard the proper use of INNs, and in accordance with World Health Assembly resolution WHA46.19, the notice from the Director-General of WHO to Member States of newly

proposed and recommended INNs habitually includes the request that Member States take the necessary steps to prevent the acquisition of proprietary rights over INNs, including prohibiting the registration of INNs as TMs.



The INNs for substances that are pharmacologically related, are – as far as possible – selected in a manner which shows their pharmacological relationship through the use of appropriate syllables called stems. Such syllables or stems are usually placed in the INN as suffixes, but sometimes in the middle or beginning of the INN as infixes or prefixes. In order to ensure that the use of such stems (in the selection of INNs for new substances belonging to the same group) is not jeopardized, the World Health Assembly (in its resolution WHA46.19) therefore also requested Member States to discourage the use as TMs of names derived from INNs, and in particular names that include established INN stems. This is especially important if the proposed TM includes an INN stem for a different pharmacological group.



In line with the above, the WHO Secretariat interacts with national trademark offices with a view to avoiding problems arising from the registration of trademarks which are similar to or derived from INNs.

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