How to Import Medicines from the UK

A practical guide for hospital procurement teams, pharmaceutical importers and NGO supply chain managers sourcing medicines from MHRA-licensed UK wholesalers.

Published by	Licence	Coverage	Updated
Euro Biom Ltd, London	WDA(H) 59239 MHRA Site 37434242	GCC, Africa, 40+ countries	April 2026

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1. Why UK Medicines? The MHRA Advantage

The United Kingdom is one of the world's most tightly regulated pharmaceutical markets. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) enforces standards that match or exceed those of the FDA and EMA, making UK-sourced medicines a gold standard for quality and traceability.

For international buyers, sourcing from an MHRA-licensed UK wholesaler means every product comes with a verified chain of custody, proper GDP-compliant storage history, and documentation that satisfies regulatory authorities worldwide.

Key advantages of UK pharmaceutical sourcing:

- MHRA oversight ensures rigorous batch-level traceability from manufacturer to end user
- GDP (Good Distribution Practice) compliance is mandatory for all licensed wholesalers
- WDA (Wholesale Dealer Authorisation) holders are regularly inspected by MHRA
- Access to both branded originator and generic medicines across 20+ therapeutic areas
- Named patient and unlicensed medicine export is legally permitted under UK regulations
- Proximity to Heathrow, the world's busiest cargo airport, enables rapid global dispatch

> *Tip: Always verify your UK supplier holds a current WDA by checking the MHRA database at inspections.mhra.gov.uk. A valid licence number should be provided upfront.*

2. Regulatory Requirements by Region

Import requirements vary significantly by destination country. Understanding your local regulatory framework before placing an order saves weeks of delays at customs.

GCC Countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman)

The Gulf Cooperation Council operates a centralised registration pathway through the GCC Central Registration Committee, though individual country authorities retain final approval. Key regulatory bodies include the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA), UAE Ministry of Health (MOHAP), and Qatar Ministry of Public Health.

- Products must be registered with the national authority or imported under special import permit
- Named patient/compassionate use pathways exist in all GCC states for unregistered medicines
- Arabic labelling requirements apply to most registered products
- Free zone regulations in UAE (DHCC, JAFZA) have separate import procedures
- Cold chain documentation is critical in the Gulf climate

Africa (Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa and others)

African pharmaceutical markets are growing rapidly but face unique regulatory challenges. National agencies like NAFDAC (Nigeria), PPB (Kenya), and FDA Ghana oversee medicine imports with varying levels of capacity and processing speed.

- NAFDAC registration in Nigeria can take 6-12 months; named patient pathways are faster
- Kenya PPB requires batch testing on arrival for certain product categories
- WHO prequalification can expedite registration in multiple African countries
- NGO and government tender imports often qualify for expedited customs clearance
- Counterfeit risk is high; buyers strongly prefer MHRA-licensed UK suppliers for traceability

3. The Import Process: Step by Step

Whether you are a hospital procurement officer or an import company, the process of sourcing UK medicines follows a predictable workflow. Here is a typical timeline from first enquiry to delivery.

Step 1: Initial Enquiry

Contact the UK wholesaler with your product list, quantities, and destination country. A reputable supplier will respond within 24 hours with availability and pricing.

Step 2: Quotation and Proforma Invoice

The wholesaler provides a formal quotation with product details, batch information, pricing, and delivery terms (typically EXW, FOB, or CIF). Review carefully and confirm.

Step 3: Regulatory Documentation

The wholesaler prepares export documentation: Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (CPP), Certificate of Free Sale, batch certificates, GDP compliance certificates, and packing lists.

Step 4: Import Licence and Permits

You secure the necessary import licence or special import permit from your national regulatory authority. The wholesaler provides any supporting documentation needed.

Step 5: Payment and Order Confirmation

Payment terms are agreed (typically advance payment or letter of credit for new relationships). The order moves to picking and packing.

Step 6: GDP-Compliant Dispatch

Products are picked from temperature-controlled storage, packed with appropriate thermal protection, and dispatched via air freight (Heathrow) with full chain-of-custody documentation.

Step 7: Customs Clearance and Delivery

Your local clearing agent handles import customs using the documentation provided. The wholesaler remains available to resolve any queries from customs authorities.

> *Typical timeline: 5-10 working days from order confirmation to delivery for standard products. Emergency and named patient orders can be dispatched within 24-48 hours.*

4. Named Patient and Unlicensed Medicine Supply

Named patient supply is one of the most important reasons international buyers source from UK wholesalers. Under UK law, MHRA-licensed wholesalers can legally export medicines that are not

registered in the destination country, provided the supply is for a specific patient or institution under appropriate medical supervision.

When is named patient supply used?

- A medicine is not registered in the destination country but is clinically needed
- The locally registered product is out of stock or discontinued
- A specific brand or formulation is required that is only available from UK/EU manufacturers
- Oncology protocols require specific drug combinations not all available locally
- Rare disease treatments with limited global distribution

Euro Biom holds a WDA that explicitly covers named patient and unlicensed medicine export. We source across 21 therapeutic areas from over 200 UK and European manufacturers.

5. Cold Chain and GDP Compliance

Good Distribution Practice (GDP) is the quality standard that governs the wholesale distribution of medicines. For international shipments, maintaining the cold chain from warehouse to destination is essential, particularly for biologics, vaccines, and temperature-sensitive oncology medicines.

GDP requirements for international pharmaceutical shipments:

- Ambient products (15-25 degrees C): insulated packaging with phase-change materials for transit
- Cold chain products (2-8 degrees C): validated cool boxes with data loggers recording temperature throughout
- Frozen products (-20 degrees C): dry ice packaging with thermal validation
- All shipments include temperature monitoring records as proof of compliance
- Storage facilities must hold a valid WDA and be regularly inspected by MHRA

6. Documentation Checklist

Having the right documentation ready before and during the import process prevents costly delays at customs. Here is a comprehensive checklist of documents typically required.

Document	Issued By	Purpose
Proforma Invoice	UK Wholesaler	Customs valuation, import permit application
Commercial Invoice	UK Wholesaler	Customs clearance, payment reconciliation
Packing List	UK Wholesaler	Customs inspection, inventory verification
Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (CPP)	MHRA / Manufacturer	Proves product is authorised in UK
Certificate of Free Sale	MHRA	Confirms product can be freely sold in UK
Batch Certificate of Analysis (CoA)	Manufacturer / QP	Quality verification, batch release evidence
GDP Compliance Certificate	UK Wholesaler	Proves proper storage and handling
Temperature Monitoring Records	UK Wholesaler	Cold chain compliance evidence
Import Licence / Permit	Destination Authority	Legal authorisation to import
Air Waybill (AWB)	Freight Forwarder	Shipping and customs clearance

7. Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Pitfall 1: Ordering from unlicensed suppliers

Always verify your UK supplier holds a current WDA. Unlicensed suppliers cannot legally export pharmaceutical products, and any products sourced from them may be seized at customs.

Pitfall 2: Incomplete documentation

Missing a single certificate can delay your shipment by weeks. Use the checklist in Section 6 and confirm all documents are in order before dispatch.

Pitfall 3: Ignoring cold chain requirements

Products that arrive outside their specified temperature range must be destroyed. Ensure your supplier uses validated thermal packaging and includes temperature monitoring data.

Pitfall 4: Underestimating regulatory timelines

Import permit processing times vary from 2 days (UAE emergency import) to 12 months (NAFDAC full registration). Plan ahead and discuss timelines with your supplier early.

Pitfall 5: Not specifying batch preferences

If your regulatory authority requires specific batch sizes, expiry dates, or manufacturer origins, communicate this at the quotation stage. Changes after dispatch are costly.

Pitfall 6: Assuming all UK wholesalers export

Many UK wholesalers only serve the domestic market. Confirm your supplier has export experience, holds an export-capable WDA, and understands destination country requirements.

8. Working with Euro Biom

Euro Biom is an MHRA-licensed UK pharmaceutical wholesale exporter based at Heathrow, London. We specialise in named patient supply, shortage medicines, and institutional export to hospitals, importers, NGOs and government health programmes across 40+ countries.

What sets us apart:

- WDA Licence No. WDA(H) 59239 - verifiable on the MHRA database
- GDP-compliant cold chain storage and dispatch from our Heathrow facility
- Access to 5,800+ products across 21 therapeutic areas
- Named patient and unlicensed medicine export capability
- Same-day response to every enquiry; emergency dispatch within 24 hours
- Full export documentation provided with every shipment

- Experienced in GCC and African regulatory requirements

Ready to discuss your requirements?

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Submit your product list and we will respond the same working day with availability and pricing.

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