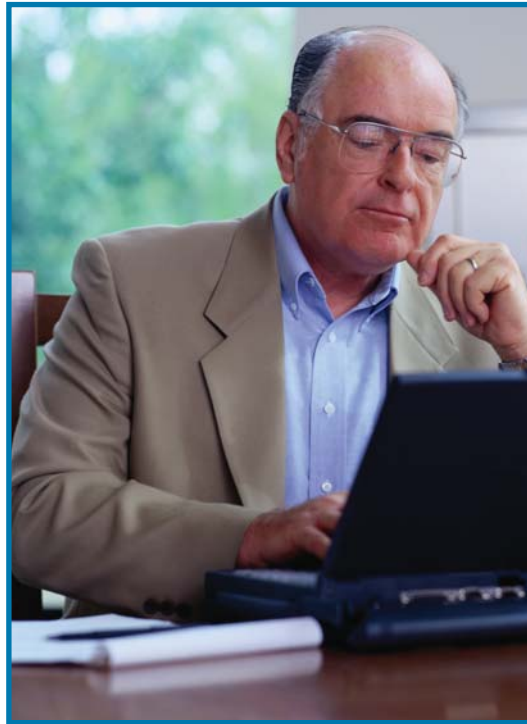


Be Cautious When Buying Medication Online

Information from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

The Food and Drug Administration cannot warn people enough about the possible dangers of buying medications online. Some websites sell medicine, such as prescription and over-the-counter drugs, that may not be safe to use and could put people's health at risk. The current system of federal and state safeguards for protecting consumers from using inappropriate or unsafe drugs has generally served the country well. But the FDA says that the best way consumers can protect themselves is to become educated about safe online shopping.



The FDA strongly cautions consumers about purchasing medication on the Internet.

operating within the law. A website can look very sophisticated and legitimate but actually be an illegal operation.

These sites often sell unapproved drugs, or if they market approved drugs, they often sidestep required practices meant to protect consumers. Some websites sell counterfeit drugs. Although counterfeit drugs may look exactly like real FDA-approved drugs, they are not legitimate and are of unknown quality and safety. If you're considering buying medicine over the Internet, look for websites with practices that

protect you. If there is no way to contact the website pharmacy by phone, if prices are dramatically lower than the competition, or if no prescription from your doctor is required, you should be especially wary.

Safe websites should...

- Be located in the United States.
- Be licensed by the state board of pharmacy where the website is

Set Your Sites High

Buying such prescription and over-the-counter drugs online from a company you don't know means you may not know exactly what you're getting. While many websites are operating legally and offering convenience, privacy, and the safeguards of traditional procedures for dispensing drugs, consumers must be wary of "rogue websites" that aren't

operating (visit www.nabp.info for a list of state boards of pharmacy).

- Have a licensed pharmacist available to answer your questions.
- Require a prescription from your doctor or other health care professional who is licensed to prescribe medicines.
- Provide contact information and allow you to talk to a person if you have problems or questions.

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy's (NABP) Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites™ Seal, also known as VIPPS® Seal, gives a seal of approval to Internet pharmacy sites that apply and meet state licensure requirements and other VIPPS® criteria. People can be confident that websites that are VIPPS-approved are legitimate. Legitimate pharmacies that carry the VIPPS® seal are listed at www.vipps.info.

Unsafe websites...

- Typically don't know your medical history or the details about your current illness or condition.
- Send you drugs with unknown quality or origin.
- Could give you the wrong medicine or another dangerous product for your illness.
- May sell prescription drugs even without a prescription—this is against the law!
- May not protect your personal information.

Know Your Medicines

Before you get any new medicine for the first time, talk to your doctor about any

special steps you need to take to fill your prescription. In addition...

- Any time you get a prescription refilled, check the physical appearance (color, texture, and shape) of the drug. Even if all of these characteristics appear to be okay, there may be a problem if the medication doesn't taste like it has in the past.
- Pay special attention to altered or unsealed containers or changes in product packaging.
- Alert your pharmacist, or whoever is providing treatment, if you notice any differences or anything unusual about the product packaging.
- Make sure that you only use drugs that have been prescribed by your health care provider who is licensed in the United States to prescribe medications.

Be aware that some medicines sold online...

- Are too old, too strong or too weak.
- Aren't FDA-approved.
- Aren't made using safe standards.
- Aren't safe to use with other medicines or products.
- Aren't labeled, stored, or shipped correctly.

Be Aware of Counterfeit Medicine

Counterfeit drugs are fake or copycat medicines that can be difficult to identify. The deliberate and fraudulent practice of counterfeiting can apply to both brand name and generic products, where the identity of the source is often mislabeled in a way that suggests it is the authentic approved product. Counterfeit drugs may...

- Be contaminated.
- Not help the condition or disease the medicine is intended to treat.
- Lead to dangerous side effects.
- Contain the wrong active ingredient.
- Be made with the wrong amounts of ingredients.
- Contain no active ingredients at all or contain too much of an active ingredient.
- Be packaged in phony packaging that looks legitimate.

Using medication that contains an active ingredient other than what was prescribed by your licensed health care provider is generally unsafe.

Generally, medications that have not been purchased with a prescription from a state-licensed pharmacy located in the United States may be unsafe and ineffective. But remember, even those drugs that are purchased from a state-licensed pharmacy website cannot be guaranteed safe and effective.

For More Information...

Visit the Food and Drug Administration website (www.fda.gov) to learn more about buying medications online.

When Buying Medications Online, Protect Yourself

- Only buy from state-licensed pharmacy sites based in the U.S. (preferably from VIPPS-certified sites, when possible).



- Don't buy from sites that sell prescription drugs without a prescription.
- Don't buy from sites that offer to prescribe a medication for the first time without a physical exam by your doctor.
- Check with your state board of pharmacy or the NABP to see if an online pharmacy has a valid pharmacy license and meets state quality standards.
- Sites ending in ".com" are usually commercial sites selling products (they may be either legitimate or rogue sites). Sites that end in ".gov" (government), ".edu" (universities or medical schools), and ".org" (not-for-profit groups) may be good sources of health information.
- Use legitimate websites that have a licensed pharmacist to answer your questions.
- Look for privacy and security policies that are easy to find and easy to understand.
- Don't give any personal information, such as a social security number, credit card information, or medical or health history, unless you are sure the website will keep your information safe and private.