

Buying Prescription Medicine Online: A Consumer Safety Guide

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Buying your medicine online can be easy. Just make sure you do it safely.

The growth of the Internet has made it possible to compare prices and buy products without ever leaving home. But **when it comes to buying medicine online, it is important to be very careful.** Some websites sell medicine that may not be safe to use and could put your health at risk.

Some websites that sell medicine:

- aren't U.S. state-licensed pharmacies or aren't pharmacies at all
- may give a diagnosis that is not correct and sell medicine that is not right for you or your condition
- won't protect your personal information

Some medicines sold online:

- are fake (counterfeit or "copycat" medicines)
- are too strong or too weak
- have dangerous ingredients
- have expired (are out-of-date)
- aren't FDA-approved (haven't been checked for safety and effectiveness)
- aren't made using safe standards
- aren't safe to use with other medicine or products you use
- aren't labeled, stored, or shipped correctly

MEET AND TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

- **Talk with your doctor** and have a physical exam before you get any new medicine for the first time.
- **Use ONLY medicine that has been prescribed** by your doctor or another trusted professional who is licensed in the U.S. to write prescriptions for medicine.
- **Ask your doctor** if there are any special steps you need to take to fill your prescription.

These tips will help protect you if you buy medicines online:

KNOW YOUR SOURCE to make sure it's safe

Make sure a website is a state-licensed pharmacy that is located in the United States. Pharmacies and pharmacists in the United States are licensed by a state's board of pharmacy. Your state board of pharmacy can tell you if a website is a state-licensed pharmacy, is in good standing, and is located in the United States. Find a list of state boards of pharmacy on the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) website at www.nabp.info.

The NABP is a professional association of the state boards of pharmacy. It has a program to help you find some of the pharmacies that are licensed to sell medicine online. Internet websites that display the seal of this program have



been checked to make sure they meet state and federal rules. For more on this program and a list of pharmacies that display the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites™ Seal, (VIPPS® Seal), go to www.vipps.info.

Look for websites with practices that protect you

A safe website should:

1. be located in the United States and licensed by the state board of pharmacy where the website is operating (check www.nabp.info for a list of state boards of pharmacy)
2. have a licensed pharmacist to answer your questions
3. require a prescription from your doctor or other health care professional who is licensed in the United States to write prescriptions for medicine
4. have a way for you to talk to a person if you have problems

BE SURE YOUR PRIVACY IS PROTECTED

Look for privacy and security policies that are easy-to-find and easy-to-understand. Don't give any personal information (such as social security number, credit card, or medical or health history), unless you are sure the website will keep your information safe and private. Make sure that the site will not sell your information, unless you agree.

PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Report websites you are not sure of, or if you have complaints about a site. Go to www.fda.gov/buyonline and click on "Notify FDA about problem websites."

For more information on buying medicines and medical products over the Internet, go to www.fda.gov and click on "Buying Medicines Online," or go directly to www.fda.gov/buyonline.

For related information, go to:

Imported medicine www.fda.gov/importeddrugs

Counterfeit medicine www.fda.gov/counterfeit

Generic drugs www.fda.gov/cder/ogd

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services | Food and Drug Administration
www.fda.gov

1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332)

In cooperation with the
National Council on Patient Information and Education
www.talkaboutrx.org