

Pharmacy Students

Health care costs are important to many patients, which may lead them to venture onto the internet to find a seemingly “better deal” than they are able to find at their local retail pharmacy. But most are not aware of the widespread dangers of illicit online pharmacies.

How to tell the difference?

Illicit Online Pharmacy	From the Patient’s Eyes	Hidden Danger	Legitimate Pharmacy
No prescription required, or easy access to a new “prescription” that is not compliant with state or federal law.	Convenience.	Prescription medication use without proper medical supervision.	Requires a prescription that is based on a valid patient-provider relationship and complies with professional guidelines and the law.
Lack proper pharmacy or staff licenses, and may operate outside of US jurisdiction.	May be unaware of the actual location of the pharmacy or the sourcing of their medications, or how to verify or inquire about basic licensure.	Purchasing prescription medication from an entity that has zero regulatory oversight, opening a channel for counterfeits to enter and cause patient harms.	Properly licensed where they operate and where the patient is located and procure medications from secure and reputable sources.
Offers suspiciously deep discounts for well-known prescription medications.	Affordability.	Taking prescription medication that may be counterfeit, ineffective, or contaminated with toxic substances.	There are cost-saving resources at the pharmacy counter, like discounts and coupons, to help patients save money.
Doesn’t protect your personal health or financial information.	May not know if the pharmacy is state-licensed, how it responsibly sources medications, or how to verify this information.	The misuse of health and financial information can cause financial, personal, and legal harm.	Requirements and fail-safes exist to limit and protect financial and health information

Shocking industry fact:

“Nearly 96 percent of websites offering drugs online operate illegally.”

Many industry leaders have recognized this as a serious problem and have worked to educate patients about the dangers of illegal online pharmacies:

National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP; nabp.pharmacy)

- Social media accounts, including <https://www.instagram.com/nabpforpatients/>
- Using humor in their “Bad Meds” campaign ads <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLbLXRQASCE>



Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP Global)

- Provider Resources <https://asopfoundation.pharmacy/provider-resources/>
- Patient Resources <https://asopfoundation.pharmacy/patient-resources/about-illegal-online-drug-sellers/>

We challenge you to come up with creative campaigns to not only help educate patients on the dangers of purchasing medications online, but also to help them do so by informing them how and when to use already-available online tools for verifying the legitimacy of online pharmacies.

Did You Know?

Harms

24% of Americans with prior experience using online pharmacies report having previously been exposed to harmful, counterfeit, or substandard medication received from an online pharmacy. Yet, even as more consumers are buying prescription online, fewer (44%) think it is risky.

False Assumptions

44% of Americans falsely believe that online pharmacies do not need a prescription from a healthcare provider to dispense the medication for certain prescription medicines. **This number jumps to (53%)** among those who have previously purchased prescription medicines online. Meanwhile, **54% of Americans** - up from 45% in 2021 - falsely believe all websites offering healthcare services/prescription medications to Americans via the Internet have been approved by the FDA or state regulators. **This misperception is even higher (68%)** among those who have previously purchased prescription medicines online, up from 59% in 2021.

Comfort

59% of Americans say they would be comfortable ordering controlled substances from an online pharmacy if unavailable at their local pharmacy.

Factors

Convenience (59%) and cost-savings (55%) remain the most frequently cited reasons Americans have or would use online pharmacies – and both outweigh safety concerns.

[Read ASOP Global Foundation’s full survey results here.](#)