



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies?

Founded in 2009, the [Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies](#) (ASOP Global) is a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization dedicated to protecting patient safety globally and ensuring patient access to safe and legitimate online pharmacies in accordance with applicable laws through advocacy, research, policy and education.

Who are ASOP Global's members?

With members representing pharmacists, patient safety groups, public health organizations, pharmaceutical manufacturers, healthcare providers and Internet security stakeholders, ASOP Global works to raise the awareness of patients and providers about the threat posed by illegal online drug sellers.

How many illegal online drug sellers are there?

Currently there are between 35,000-50,000 active online drug sellers selling prescription medicines on the Internet. 97% of online pharmacies operate illegally and more than 50% of medicines sold worldwide from illegal online sources are counterfeit. ASOP collects data on the scope of this problem and works globally to ensure that law enforcement, regulators and policymakers can effectively implement the rules online.

What are the risks associated with purchasing a prescription medication from illegal online pharmacies?

The medication could be counterfeit; it could have been manufactured in unsafe and/or unregulated conditions; it could have no therapeutic value; and it could contain the improper dosage of active ingredients leading to adverse reactions or even death. In addition to the health risks, consumers who purchase prescription medications from illegal online drug sellers also risk having their identity stolen by providing these criminals with credit card and other personal information.

What are some of the products found to be in counterfeit medications?

Products sold by illegal online drug sellers often are manufactured in unsafe conditions and contain no active ingredients or contain dangerous substances including floor wax, mercury, concrete, chalk, boric acid, road tar, paint, anti-freeze and other poisons. This means that patients are just a click away from products that may harm or even kill them.

What are the warning signs consumers should look for?

Warning signs of potentially fraudulent online drug sellers are those that (1) are located outside the United States or are not licensed in the U.S. by a state agency; (2) don't require a prescription; (3) offer extremely low prices that seem too good to be true; (4) those that send spam or unsolicited email; and (5) those that ship medications worldwide or from a foreign country.

How can a consumer know if an online pharmacy is legitimate?

A legal online pharmacy is licensed and FDA regulated; requires a valid prescription; is licensed by the state board of pharmacy (or equivalent state agency); is located in the United States; has a physical street address; and has a licensed pharmacist available for consultation.

Where can consumers learn whether an online pharmacy is legal?

To determine whether an online pharmacy is legal, consumers should check with the **VIPPS** (Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites) program <https://vipps.nabp.net> – an online tool from the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy – or **Legitscript.com** www.legitscript.com. In addition, consumers can contact their local state boards of pharmacy.

Do consumers have any recourse if they buy a counterfeit medication?

Unfortunately, since these illegal online drug sellers are located outside the U.S., they have no legal recourse if the medication purchased from an illegal online pharmacy is fake or does not have the proper therapeutic effect. However, if a consumer suspects that an online pharmacy is fraudulent, the product he/she receives is counterfeit, or he/she suffers an adverse reaction from the product, contact FDA's MedWatch at www.fda.gov/safety/medwatch/default.htm.

Are there any federal regulations or laws that address online pharmacies?

The Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act enacted in 2008 requires all online pharmacies dispensing controlled substances to register with the DEA. Federal and state laws prohibit the sale of medications without a prescription whether or not the Internet is involved, while federal law prohibits the sale of medications in the U.S. that have not been approved by the FDA, including sales over the Internet. Currently, however, there is no Federal law specifically addressing online sales of all prescription medications in the way the Ryan Haight Act covers controlled substances.

What role do Internet commerce companies and Internet payment processors play in helping ASOP achieve its goals?

A report from the U.S. Center for Medicine in the Public Interest found that illegal online drug sellers generated \$75 billion in 2010, a 92% increase from 2005. Internet commerce companies, search engines, domain name registrars and shippers are able to voluntarily shut them down.