

COUNTERFEIT PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

PROTECT YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY, AND YOUR PETS

ORDERING PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES ONLINE

Buying medicine on the internet can be risky: Ninety-seven percent of online pharmacies don't comply with pharmacy laws and standards. Here are some tips when purchasing online:

- Check to see if the pharmacy is licensed by the California State Board of Pharmacy at www.pharmacy.ca.gov.
- Look for “.pharmacy” in the website address, which is a top-level domain (like “.com” and “.net”) used by pharmacy-related entities that have been verified as safe and legitimate.
- Use only pharmacy websites displaying the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS) seal. This guarantees the pharmacy is licensed and sells FDA-approved medicine. To find a VIPPS online pharmacy, go to www.nabp.pharmacy.
- Make sure a valid prescription is required and not available from an online doctor who is linked to the site.
- Beware of very low prices and locations outside the United States.
- Make sure a licensed pharmacist is available to answer questions.
- Check if there's a physical address, phone number or other contact information listed. Many medicines bought from websites that hide their physical address are counterfeit, according to the World Health Organization. Also, many online pharmacies say they are in Canada because people assume Canadian medicine is safe, but the pharmacies or medicine they sell are really located in another country.

You see an ad for prescription medicines at half of what you now pay. Sounds tempting—but be careful.

You could be buying counterfeit prescription medicine or medicine that may be expired or contain the wrong dosage or none of the active ingredient. These medicines may not work and could contain toxic ingredients that can cause allergic reactions, harmful side effects or even death.

COUNTERFEIT DRUGS EXPLAINED

Deadly ingredients that have been found in counterfeit medicine include rat poison, floor wax, brick dust, sheet rock, house paint, road paint, paint thinner, boric acid, antifreeze, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), benzopyrenes, mercury, lead, cadmium, arsenic, chrome, uranium, strontium, selenium, and aluminum.

Counterfeit medicine can be generic or brand-name and includes pet medicines, antibiotics, painkillers and drugs to treat erectile dysfunction, weight loss, heart conditions, mental health issues, HIV, AIDS, diabetes, and cancer.

These fake medicines often come from countries where government enforcement is weak, but they can be manufactured anywhere.

IS IT A FAKE?

Counterfeits often look exactly like real medicine and can even fool health care professionals. Here are some signs that your prescription drugs could be counterfeit:

- The container label has a name for a drug you did not order.
- The pills are chipped or cracked.
- The container and packaging have changed.
- The label on the container is crooked.
- Foreign language text appears on the label.
- The medicine is in a baggie, not a prescription container.
- The drug looks or tastes differently than it used to.
- The drug causes a different reaction or does not work as well as the medicine you are used to.

Image Caption: Lipitor, a statin used to control cholesterol, is a Pfizer drug that is often counterfeited. Counterfeit pills, at left, are placed next to real pills, at right, for comparison. It is hard to tell a counterfeit just by looking at it, so only buy from a legitimate pharmacy.

Image Caption: This counterfeit drug manufacturing site in China produced fake Viagra and other drugs that were sold to customers in Europe and the United States.

LOWER YOUR RISK

Unfortunately, the making and selling of counterfeit medicine happens and it's hard to tell a fake without chemical testing.

Be aware and protect yourself by always getting a prescription from a licensed health care provider and filling it at a licensed pharmacy. Don't buy medicines off Craigslist or from street vendors.

If you are traveling outside the United States, be sure to take enough of your prescription medicines. Drugs in foreign countries may be counterfeit, or you may receive the wrong drug.

If you suspect you received counterfeit medicine, contact the pharmacy where you purchased it and notify:

- The California State Board of Pharmacy, (916) 518-3100, www.pharmacy.ca.gov

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), (800) 332-1088, www.fda.gov

LICENSING IS KEY

Buying your prescription medicine from a pharmacy licensed by the California State Board of Pharmacy is the best way to be sure it is safe. All pharmacies, including online pharmacies, that dispense prescription medicine to California patients must be licensed in California to protect patients' health and safety.

Licensed pharmacies are regulated and inspected. Under California and federal laws, it is illegal to sell prescription medicine without a valid prescription. Also, if a pharmacy is in a state outside of California and sells to California residents, it must be licensed in both its home state and California.

Image Caption: These used bottles and vials, seized during a raid in Colombia, were being washed for reuse to hold counterfeit medicines.

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF PHARMACY

2720 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 100

Sacramento, CA 95833

Phone: (916) 518-3100 Fax: (916) 574-8618

www.pharmacy.ca.gov

Licensed pharmacies are regulated and inspected. Under California and federal laws, it is illegal to sell prescription medicine without a valid prescription. Also, if a pharmacy is in a state outside of California and sells to California residents, it must be licensed in both its home state and California.