

Using an online pharmacy to buy meds? It's buyer beware, FDA says

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It might be tempting to buy prescription medication online, but buyers

should beware, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns.

While some [pharmacy](#) websites operate legally and can offer convenience, privacy and lower costs, others may be selling unapproved, counterfeit and unsafe medications, the [FDA](#) advises.

Many unsafe online pharmacies do exist, offering [prescription medications](#) without requiring a prescription and selling them at "deeply discounted" prices.

These pharmacies may use fake "store fronts" designed to mimic licensed pharmacies. They may imply or say that their medicines come from countries with high safety standards, according to the FDA.

Yet, what they're selling could be made anywhere without safety or effectiveness. The drugs could also be fake or expired.

Be wary if the online pharmacy does not require a doctor's prescription, the FDA cautioned. Other red flags: The pharmacy is not licensed in the United States or by your state board of pharmacy and doesn't have a licensed pharmacist on staff to answer questions.

You should also beware medicine that looks different from what you receive at your usual pharmacy, arrives in damaged packaging, is labeled in a [foreign language](#), has no expiration date or is expired.

A price that seems too good to be true is another warning sign.

An unsafe online pharmacy may not provide clear written protections about guarding your personal and [financial information](#), may charge you for products you never ordered or received, or may sell your information to others.

The medications from these pharmacies may have too much or too little of the active ingredient that treats your condition. They may contain a different [active ingredient](#) or a harmful substance.

These medications may fail to help you but may also have an unexpected interaction with other medicines you take, cause an allergic reaction or have a dangerous side effect. They may not have been stored properly, which could make them ineffective.

Despite all of these problems, it is still possible to find a safe online pharmacy.

The FDA suggests looking for one that always requires a doctor's prescription, provides a physical address and telephone number in the United States and has a licensed pharmacist on staff to answer your questions.

This online pharmacy should be licensed with a state board of pharmacy. You can check the pharmacy's license in the state's board of pharmacy license database by using the location tool on the FDA's [BeSafeRx website](#). Don't use a pharmacy that isn't listed.

More information: The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy has more on efforts to shut down [illegal online pharmacies](#).

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