

US sues top drug firm over opioid distribution

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The US Justice Department sued leading drug distributor AmerisourceBergen Thursday, alleging that despite the country's addiction crisis the company has failed to report suspicious pharmacy orders for addictive opioids as required.

The Justice Department said that AmerisourceBergen, which has already agreed to pay \$6.1 billion to states to settle claims it helped stoke the [opioid crisis](#), continued to violate its reporting obligation from 2014 to the present, even participating in hiding suspicious orders.

For example, the department alleged that AmerisourceBergen was aware that two customer pharmacies, in Florida and West Virginia, were selling prescription drugs to likely addicts "in parking lots for cash."

The company also readily sold oxycodone tablets, the lawsuit alleged, to a Colorado [pharmacy](#) knowing that the site was supplying eleven people it identified as potential [drug](#) addicts, two of whom later died of overdoses.

Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta also said that when the company noticed highly suspicious purchases from a New Jersey pharmacy, it terminated their direct relationship, but then arranged for a third-party proxy to handle sales to the pharmacy.

"In the midst of a catastrophic [opioid](#) epidemic, AmerisourceBergen allegedly altered its internal systems in a way that reduced the number of

orders that would be flagged as suspicious," said Gupta.

"In short, the government's complaint alleges that, for years, AmerisourceBergen prioritized profits over its legal obligations and over Americans' wellbeing," she said.

In a detailed statement, AmerisourceBergen said that in each of five cases that the Justice Department specified, it had taken the required reporting actions and blamed the US Drug Enforcement Administration for mishandling the cases.

"The complaint filed by the Department of Justice attempts to shift the onus of interpreting and enforcing the law from the Department of Justice and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to an industry they are tasked with regulating and policing," it said.

"Former bureaucrats at the DEA simply tried to make private companies take on their responsibility of determining what pharmacies should be able to dispense opioid medication," the company said.

Gupta said that if the company was found liable in the lawsuit, it could face civil penalties in the billions of dollars.

AmerisourceBergen was one of around 16 major drug manufacturers, distributors and pharmacy chains who have faced lawsuits around the country for pushing massive amounts of addictive opioids like Oxycontin onto the market, resulting in a sharp rise in [drug addiction](#) and overdose deaths.

More than one million Americans have died from overdoses over the past two decades.

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