

# How to Buy Medicines Safely From an Online Pharmacy



Español (</consumers/articulos-en-espanol/como-comprar-medicinas-en-una-farmacia-virtual-de-manera-segura>)

Ever been tempted to buy your medicines from an online pharmacy or another website?

Protect yourself and your family by using caution when buying medicine online. There are many pharmacy websites that operate legally and offer convenience, privacy, and safeguards for purchasing medicines.

But the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns that there are many rogue online pharmacies that claim to sell prescription medicines at deeply discounted prices, often without requiring a valid prescription. These Internet-based pharmacies often sell unapproved or counterfeit medicines outside the safeguards followed by licensed pharmacies.

These rogue sites often prominently display a Canadian flag, but may actually be operated by criminals from the other side of the globe with no connection to Canada. Medicines bought from these websites can be dangerous and may put your health at risk.

How can you tell if an online pharmacy is operating legally? The FDA's BeSafeRx (<https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/BuyingMedicinesOvertheInternet/BeSafeRxKnowYourOnlineP>) can help you identify and avoid fake online pharmacies.

## Signs of a Rogue Online Pharmacy

Beware of online pharmacies that:

- Allow you to buy prescription medicine without a valid prescription from your health care provider.
- Do not have a U.S. state-licensed pharmacist available to answer your questions.
- Offer very low prices that seem too good to be true.
- Send spam or unsolicited email offering cheap medicine.
- Are located outside of the United States or ship worldwide.

These pharmacies often sell medicines that can be dangerous because they may:

- Have too much or too little of the active ingredient you need to treat your disease or condition.
- Not contain the right active ingredient.
- Contain the wrong or other harmful ingredients.


The active ingredient is what makes the medicine effective for the illness or condition it is intended to treat. If a medicine has unknown active ingredients, it could fail to have the intended effect, could have an unexpected interaction with other medicines you are taking, could cause dangerous side effects, or may cause other serious health problems, such as serious allergic reactions.

Also, these medicines may not have been stored properly, such as in a warehouse without necessary temperature controls, which may cause the medicine to be ineffective in treating the disease or condition for which you are taking it.

## Know the Signs of a Safe Online Pharmacy

There are ways you can identify a safe online pharmacy. They:

- Require a valid prescription from a doctor or another licensed health care professional.
- Are licensed by your state board of pharmacy, or equivalent state agency. (To verify the licensing status of a pharmacy check your state board of pharmacy (/drugs/besafex-know-your-online-pharmacy/know-your-online-pharmacy).)
- Have a U.S. state-licensed pharmacist available to answer your questions.
- Are in the United States, and provide a street address.

Another way to check on a website is to look for the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy's (NABP) Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites™ Seal, also known as the VIPPS® Seal. This seal means that the Internet pharmacy is safe to use because it has met state licensure requirements, as well as other NABP criteria. Visit the VIPPS website (<https://nabp.pharmacy/programs/vipps/>)  (<http://www.fda.gov/about-fda/website-policies/website-disclaimer>) to find legitimate pharmacies that carry the VIPPS® seal.

## Shop Safely Online

- Learn more about the risks of buying prescription medicine from rogue online pharmacies (<https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/BuyingMedicinesOvertheInternet/BeSafeRxKnowYourOr>)
- Report sales of medicine on the Internet (/safety/report-problem/reporting-unlawful-sales-medical-products-internet) by illegal online pharmacies to the FDA.
- Report adverse effects caused by any medicine (<https://www.fda.gov/Safety/MedWatch/default.htm>) to FDA's MedWatch program.
- Visit FDA's web page on counterfeit medicine (/counterfeit-medicine) for more information.

[back to top](#)