

"Affordable pet prescriptions!"

"No prescription required!"

"Pet meds at discount prices!"

"Your best source for pet meds!"

Internet sites that sell pet medicines can be reputable pharmacies. However, other Internet sites are fronts for businesses breaking Federal, State, and sometimes, International laws. Illegal online pharmacies may sell medicines that are counterfeit, outdated, mislabeled, incorrectly formulated, or improperly made or stored. These medicines may not contain the actual drug, may contain contaminants or the incorrect amount of drug, may not work as well due to age or being stored in conditions that were too hot, cold, or humid, and may not have the proper directions for use. If you are unhappy with ordered products, illegal online pet pharmacies may fraudulently leave you with no way to get your money back. In the end, you may find buying prescription pet medicines online costly to your pet's health and your wallet.

If you find a cheaper medicine online, ask your veterinarian to consider matching the price. Many veterinarians are willing to competitively charge based on the online price you've found. You should also know that neither the drug maker nor your veterinarian will stand behind a product's guarantee if you purchase the product online.

If you still want to purchase your pet's prescription medicines online, remember there is no fool-proof way to tell if an online pet pharmacy is legal. However, you can protect yourself by doing your homework and being online pharmacy A.W.A.R.E.

A—Ask Your Veterinarian

Before you purchase online, talk with your veterinarian! Your veterinarian wants

what's best for you and your pet. Ask your veterinarian questions like, "Do you trust the Internet pharmacy site?" "Have you ever worked with the pharmacy?" "Have other clients used that site? If so, what were their experiences?"

W—Watch for Red Flags

When buying from online pharmacies, keep an eye out for red flags. Be careful if the ...

- site does not require veterinary prescriptions for prescription medicines. Websites that sell prescription veterinary medicines without valid veterinary prescriptions are breaking the law. Under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, a pharmacy can't sell you a veterinary prescription medicine without a valid prescription or other type of order from a licensed veterinarian. Online questionnaires or consults don't take the place of valid veterinary prescriptions. Sites that sell medicines without requiring valid veterinary prescriptions rob you and your pet of the protection provided by a veterinary physical exam.

- site has no licensed pharmacist available to answer questions.

Can someone answer your questions about your pet's medicines?

- site does not list its physical business address, phone number, or other contact information.

If something goes wrong with your order, can you get in contact with them?

- site is not based in the United States. If an out-of-country site fraudulently takes your money, there's not much the U.S. government can do to help you get your money back.

- site is not licensed by the State Board of Pharmacy where the business is based. If the site operates in the United States, check the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) website to see if the pharmacy is properly licensed: <http://www.nabp.net/consumers/board-of-pharmacy-contacts/>.

- site does not protect your personal information.

Keep yourself safe from identity theft! Make sure the site you use is secure.

- site's prices are dramatically lower than your veterinarian's or other websites' prices. If it seems too good to be true, then it probably is.

- site ships you medicines that you didn't order or that look very different from what your pet normally takes. Don't give these medicines to your pet! Contact the site immediately!

A -Ask your veterinarian

W -Watch for red flags

A -Always check for site accreditation

R -Report problems and suspicious pharmacies

E -Educate yourself about online pet pharmacies

A—Always Check for Site Accreditation

In addition to following Federal and State licensing and inspection requirements, in 2009, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) created a voluntary accreditation program called **Vet-VIPPS** (Veterinary-Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites). Vet-VIPPS accredited online pet pharmacies:

- are appropriately licensed in the states from which they ship drugs
- have successfully completed a 19-point review and online survey
- undergo yearly VIPPS review and re-accreditation
- undergo NABP on-site surveys every three years

Vet-VIPPS accredited pharmacies must meet other criteria, including protecting client confidentiality, strict quality assurance, and making sure prescription orders are valid.

R—Report Problems and Suspicious Online Pet Pharmacies

If your pet has a problem with a medicine purchased online (for example, a reaction to the medicine or the medicine not working), first contact the medicine's maker. To report

problems directly to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM), call **1-888-FDA-VETS**. For a copy of the reporting form (FDA Form 1932a) and for more information on how to report problems, visit the following website:

<http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/ReportaProblem/ucm055305.htm>.

Protect yourself, your pets, and others! Don't fall victim to illegal online pet pharmacies. Report suspicious online pet pharmacy sites to the FDA and the NABP at:

FDA: <http://www.fda.gov/Safety/ReportaProblem/ucm059315.htm>

NABP: <http://www.nabp.net/>

E—Educate Yourself about Online Pet Pharmacies

The best defense you have against illegal online pet pharmacies is education. Do your homework and be online pet pharmacy A.W.A.R.E. before you purchase your pet's medicines online. **An informed consumer is an empowered consumer.**

For more information about purchasing pet medicines from online pet pharmacies, visit CVM's website at: www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary, or call CVM at 1-240-276-9300.