



FDA Warning about Online Pet Pharmacies[©]

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The veterinary industry has been infiltrated with online consumer mercantilism with the birth of online pet pharmacies. They are effective competitors with eye catching advertisements that will grab your client's attention and promise to have the lowest prices and best products. How are your clients supposed to make an informed decision about what is best for their pet? How will they know they are getting the best value for their dollar? Are there health risks associated with such products?

Some of these sites are fronts for businesses breaking Federal, State, and sometimes, International laws and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has finally made a statement with the launch of two brochures you can use to educate your clients. Per the FDA, illegal online pharmacies may sell medicines that are counterfeit, outdated, mislabeled, incorrectly formulated, or improperly made or stored. They may not contain the actual drug, the correct amount of drug, or have the proper directions for use. These medicines may contain contaminants or have been stored in conditions that were too hot, cold, or humid.

Through its brochures, the FDA educates consumers on the dangers of online pet pharmacies. It suggests that consumers consult with their veterinarians first to see if they would match the "discount" price offered by the competitor. The benefit from obtaining medications from practitioners is in knowing and trusting the source of the product. Additionally, one of FDA's brochures states that consumers should be A.W.A.R.E.....

A: Ask Your Veterinarian – Before you purchase online, talk with your veterinarian. Your vet supports and wants what is best for both you and your pet

W: Watch for Red Flags – When buying from online pharmacies, be wary if...

- the site does not require prescription
- if there is no licenses pharmacist available to answer questions
- if the site does not list physical business address, phone number or contact information
- Site is not based in the United States
- Site is not licensed by the State Board of Pharmacy where the business is based
- Site does not protect your personal information

- their prices are dramatically lower than your veterinarians or other websites
- the site ships you medicine that you didn't order, or doesn't look like what your pet normally takes

A: Always Check for Site Accreditation – in 2009, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy created an accreditation program called Vet-VIPPS to help you identify pharmacy sites legally selling prescription medication

R: Report Problems and Suspicious Online Pharmacies – if your pet has a problem with a medication you purchased online, contact the manufacture and the FDA

E: Educate Yourself About Online Pharmacies – Do your homework. Being an informed consumer is an empowered consumer

The FDA's second brochure, "Buyer Beware", focuses on the importance of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship as it relates to the importance of monitoring patients under the care of prescription medications

Consumers are commonly turning to online pharmacies to purchase two types of medications. Heartworm preventives and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) are the most common. Neither one of these types of drugs should be used without proper veterinary care and monitoring. NSAIDS are prescribed to relieve pain in dogs, and prior to being prescribed, their possible side effects should be discussed with the owner. Heartworm medication is occasionally subject to reports of product ineffectiveness due to poor client compliance, so regular yearly testing is imperative to ensure the dogs are not infected with heartworm.

Vet-VIPPS, the Veterinary-Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites, is a voluntary accreditation program of the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy. The NABP gives their seal of approval to internet pharmacy sites that comply with federal and state licensing and inspection requirements. The NABP's strict criterion that a pharmacy must follow in order to stay accredited includes, protecting patient confidentiality, quality assurance and validity of prescription orders. To find out if a specific online pharmacy is Vet-VIPPS accredited, visit the NABP site, www.nabp.net and click on Accreditation Programs.

The FDA's two informative brochures on the risks of online pet pharmacies can be found at: <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/AnimalVeterinary/ResourcesforYou/AnimalHealthLiteracy/UCM203063.pdf>.

<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm048164.htm>