

## Counterfeit Drug Safety Tips for Patients



**Buying your prescriptions from an online pharmacy? Check and make sure it is [VIPPS-certified](#) before making any purchases.** VIPPS stands for Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites, and it is an online pharmacy accreditation service provided by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy. If an online pharmacy has received [VIPPS accreditation](#), you can be confident that they are in compliance with state and federal regulations, as well as meeting the NABP's criteria for safe online pharmacies.



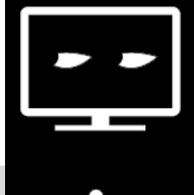
**Not sure your online pharmacy is legitimate? Visit [Legitscript](#) to check that it is a legitimate pharmacy.** [Legitscript](#) provides a free online assessment tool for consumers to check the legitimacy of an Internet pharmacy. They do this by verifying that the website in question adheres to all applicable laws and regulations. They also provide a frequently updated list of sites to avoid, and champion efforts to take down fake online pharmacies.



**Ask your doctor to see packaging for your medication. Does the packaging look genuine to you?** When you buy prescriptions at a pharmacy, you can always ask the pharmacist to show you the bottle your prescription came in and do the same thing at the doctor's office. Before you ingest medication at a doctor's office or clinic, request to see the packaging the drugs came in, and be on the lookout for accurate labeling, the condition of the package, and the language of the labeling. All prescriptions approved for sale in the US should have product descriptions in English.



**If you are unsure whether your prescription is genuine or not, visit [WebMD](#) online to look up the drug's description and appearance.** [WebMD](#) provides photos of most common medications. Simply look up an image of the prescription drug in question, and compare it to what you have. If they do not look the same, you may have a counterfeit.



**Be wary of scam artists online who try to sell you discount prescription cards or ask for too much personal information.** Genuine patient prescription assistance programs never ask for money for their services.



**If you are worried about being able to afford your medical prescription, apply for a [NeedyMeds](#) card to take advantage of their drug discount program.** [NeedyMeds](#) is a non-profit program that assists patients in getting discounted medicine using a NeedyMeds card. The card cannot be used in combination with insurance, and is designed to help patients afford drugs that are not covered or have a high co-pay.



**If you know you cannot afford your medical prescription, visit [PParx.org](#) to find out if you qualify for subsidized prescription program.** The Partnership for Prescription Assistance is a non-profit service that provides qualifying patients who do not have prescription drug coverage to get their medication free or nearly free.

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**Don't buy prescription drugs from pharmacy websites that do not require prescriptions!** Any site that does not need a prescription is likely selling fake drugs. If you visit an online pharmacy to purchase your medication, they should require the submission of a copy of your prescription in digital or fax form. If they instead tell you they do not need it, or simply have you fill out a questionnaire, be suspicious. If they fail to require a prescription, it is likely they have no compunction about selling you cheaply-made counterfeits.



**Buying your cat or dog their prescriptions from an online pharmacy? Be sure it is VetVIPPS-certified before making any purchases.** [Vet-VIPPS](#) provides accreditation for the fast-growing online pet pharmacy industry. If an online pet pharmacy is Vet-VIPPS accredited, you can rest assure your animal pals will receive safe and genuine medication.



**During flu season, beware of too-good-to-be-true flu cures and treatments. They are probably fake.** Every year, colds, influenza and other seasonal illnesses make their way across the United States. Health practitioners try to encourage vaccination, but drug counterfeiters see these epidemics as a money-making opportunity. Before deciding to try a flu treatment you see advertised online or in advertisements, ask your doctor about whether he/she has heard of it. If not, don't take a chance with a fly-by-night cure.



**Just because an online pharmacy has a Canadian flag on its home page does not mean it is located in Canada. Find out where that online pharmacy is really located before buying anything from them.** Online pharmacies use the Canadian flag to lull you into a false sense of security, since Canada has a reputation for low cost prescriptions. Website addresses and images tell you almost nothing about where that "[Canadian](#)" [online pharmacy](#) is actually located. That innocent-looking online pharmacy could very well be a front for drug counterfeiters. Don't take a chance with your health or your identity by visiting these sites.



**Question natural remedies. Don't believe that a "natural" remedy is a genuine treatment. It may be a dangerous unapproved pharmaceutical that has skirted the FDA approval process.** Every year, the FDA sends warnings about purportedly herbal remedies that instead contain dangerous or unapproved pharmaceutical ingredients. Since these remedies are not classified as pharmaceuticals, their manufacturers can skip the FDA approval process by calling them "supplements." In so doing they dodge oversight that is applied to medication. Natural remedies may be just what they say they are, or they may contain dangerous drugs not approved for US sale. Only buy natural remedies from verified sources that clearly state their ingredients. Also watch out for natural remedies that make medical claims that can't be substantiated.

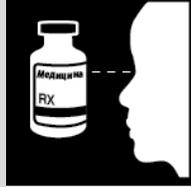


**Use caution when buying very popular or very expensive prescriptions from online pharmacies. Popular and expensive drugs are the two most likely types to be counterfeited.** Counterfeiters target high turnover, high value drugs. A worrying new trend in drug counterfeiting are chronic disease medications and high-priced, injectable biologic treatments for cancer, migraine, osteoporosis and other illnesses. Injectable drugs are much more expensive and easy to replace with water, acetone or other clear liquids.

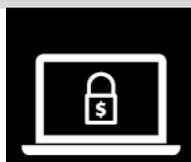
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**Did you know that counterfeit medicine is most commonly available to consumers via online pharmacies? Use caution when buying drugs online.** WHO estimates that 50% of medicines offered by websites which conceal their physical address are counterfeit. ([from MHRA](#))



**Does your prescription have a foreign language label? Report it to your doctor/pharmacist, as it is likely counterfeit.** Foreign language labeling is good indicator that prescription drug has not passed through US drug supply chain: All medicine approved by the FDA for sale in the United States is required to have clear labeling and instructions in English. If the label is in another language, be suspicious.



**Protect your financial security when buying prescriptions online.** Patients who've bought medicines from suspect websites have later been victims of extortion and identity theft. Only buy from VIPPS pharmacies which are in compliance with US law, and therefore safe for your body as well as your wallet.



**Do you believe the promises pharmacy spam emails offer you? Don't trust a pharmacy that sends you spam.** Did you know that a quarter of all spam messages sent are offering medicines? Your chances are of getting genuine medication from a "pharmacy" you have never heard of that advertises using spam are very poor indeed. Spam emails are an inexpensive way for counterfeit drug criminals to target innocent consumers. Do not trust them.



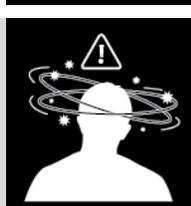
**Check the label on your prescription.** Is label crooked? Does it look different than previous prescriptions of the same drug? Are the instructions in English? Does the packaging look clean and correctly sealed? When comparing packaging, look for differences in paper, printing, color, and fonts (i.e. is it the same size, raised print, embossed, etc.). If you notice changes, do not take the drugs, and show the packaging to your doctor.



**Closely examine the appearance of your medication.** Are the pills cracked or chipped? Has the pill color changed? Does it appear a shade different from earlier prescriptions? Manufacturers of both name-brand and generic drugs take great pains to produce drugs of uniform and standardized appearance. If the pills look different, they may be fake.



**Pay attention to changes in the taste of your pills.** Does the drug taste different? If your drugs do not seem to have the same taste or if you feel different than usual, immediately write down your symptoms and contact your doctor and pharmacist.



**Do not ignore your symptoms if you experience side effects from a new dose of your prescription.** Did you experience any adverse effects, or did treatment not work at all? Is there anything unusual in your body's reaction compared to previous experiences, such as a stomach ache or headache? This could be a sign that the drug you took contained a different compound than it was supposed to or did not contain any genuine drug at all. Take your medication to your doctor or pharmacist to inspect.

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**Always ask to see the packaging for any injection your doctor wants to give you.** Injectables are the newest drugs that appeal to counterfeiters due to the high cost/profit ratio. Several high profile counterfeit drug cases in the last year have involved injectable treatments given at doctor's offices.



**Buy medicine safely online when you see the VIPPS seal.** Only purchase prescription drugs from genuine, [VIPPS-approved online pharmacies](#) that are accredited by the NABP and follow all state and federal laws.

Sample  
Appearance  
Feel  
Evaluate  
Doctor  
Report  
Unavailable  
Gather



**Use the Partnership for Safe Medicines 8 step checklist for medicine safety.** Learn how to avoid counterfeit medicines by using the Partnership for Safe Medicines [8-step checklist](#) for medicine safety. It is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese & Tagalog.



**Get all the answers to your questions about counterfeit drugs from the Partnership for Safe Medicines FAQs.** Need some answers about counterfeit drugs? We have them. Visit our [frequently asked questions](#) page to find out more.

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