

What is an **Alternative Funding Program** or an **Importation Program**?

Is it safe for Americans to get medicine from non-US pharmacies?

Some employers are hiring consultants, sometimes called "Alternative Funding Program (AFP) vendors" or "importation program vendors," to supply employees and their families with illegally imported and unsafe medicines.

■ **How would I know if I'm affected?**

You might be told that your health insurance no longer covers a medication unless you order it from a Canadian or other foreign pharmacy. Or you might have gotten an offer from a vendor hired by your employer that says your prescription will not have an out of pocket cost anymore if you shift it to a foreign pharmacy.

■ **Is this even legal? Is it safe?**

No, it is not legal. While we know of very few cases where an individual has been prosecuted for importing medicine, it is not legal to import non-FDA-approved medications. U.S. Customs and Border Protection may exercise discretion to allow these medicines through, but this activity is still unlawful and potentially subject to civil and criminal penalties.

It is not safe to take medicines exported from another country's drug supply by foreign pharmacies or pharmacists. Foreign drug sellers may not even be licensed in their country; they may just exist to mail order medicines outside the country. They certainly aren't regulated by your state Board of Pharmacy. If they make a mistake like sending you the wrong medicine and you get hurt, there may be no means to hold them liable.

■ **Not even a pharmacist can tell a real medicine from a fake one without lab testing.**

Here are some almost perfect copies of a popular blood thinner counterfeiters sold to Americans in 2023 that could only be detected through lab testing. They contained no active ingredient and the bottles look legitimate.



These fake versions of blood thinners (anti-coagulants) were sold to Americans in licensed Mexican border pharmacies staffed by licensed Mexican pharmacists. The pills inside had no medicine in them, only chalk. The third example above is a Spanish language label and bottle of Eliquis. It is also entirely devoid of medicine. Your vendor may tell you that medicine from foreign countries is safe, but they are taking risks with your life. The medical consequences for patients who took these fakes are heart attacks and strokes.

Why would an employer want me to shift my medicines to a foreign unlicensed pharmacy?

Example: If your employer currently pays \$1,000 / month for a life-saving medicine for you, they can save \$600 by getting you to accept a less safe medicine from an unlicensed foreign provider. They may have told you it cuts your \$50 copay out, but **they are saving a fortune by making you accept the risk of getting the wrong medication or a harmful counterfeit, and of losing access to a local pharmacy.**

Also note, that when the vendor shunts you to an unlicensed foreign pharmacy, that pharmacy will require you to sign a waiver of liability so that **if you're hurt, you can't hold the foreign entity responsible.**

What should I do if I'm asked to obtain my medicine from a foreign pharmacy?

For the sake of your own health, you should not take any medicine that doesn't come from a state-licensed pharmacy. Both brick-and-mortar and mail-order pharmacies are required to have a state license, which you can find on the relevant state Board of Pharmacy's website.

Whom do I tell?

Individuals who import small quantities of medicine for personal use are not targets of investigation.

You can confidentially report this troubling patient-endangering behavior to:

- Homeland Security Investigations:
Email iprcenter@hsi.dhs.gov, denoting "AFP" in the subject line.
- You can also report vendors and employers engaging in these programs to the Partnership for Safe Medicines at editors@safemedicines.org.