

Do You Know What Could Be Hiding In Your Medicine Cabinet?

Simple Tips To Protect Yourself

(NAPSA)—The Internet has made it possible to find almost anything you need, anytime you need it. From clothes to appliances, we shop online because it's convenient and easy to find the best price. When it comes to buying medicine online, though, consumers need to be sure they're getting the real thing.

In 2010, one in six Americans bought medicines on the Internet, potentially exposing themselves to harmful, fake medicines. Because the Internet is mostly unregulated, counterfeit medicines are commonly available online. The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy® (NABP) reviewed more than 8,000 websites selling prescription drugs, and found that only a very small percentage of them (4 percent) followed pharmacy laws and standard practices. Nearly half of these sites were selling medicines to Americans that were never approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Taking counterfeit medicines can have serious consequences. Fake medicine has been found to contain dangerous substances, like rat poison and lead paint. They are also often made in dirty places, such as bathrooms, by people without medical backgrounds. Fakes also often do not contain the correct amount of active pharmaceutical ingredient (API), which is what makes real medicines effective.

"All types of medicines have been counterfeited—from allergy medicines to medicines for cancer, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and pain management," said Dr. Jed Kaminetsky, a urologist and clinical associate professor, New York University Langone



It's hard to tell fake medicines from real ones just by looking at them—but it's easy to buy medicine safely if you know what to look for.

Medical Center. "It is extremely difficult to tell a fake medicine from a real one simply by looking at it. When consumers don't get the medicine their doctors prescribe, there are very real health risks."

Medicines to treat erectile dysfunction (ED) are among the most frequently counterfeited. New research shows that not only are fake ED medicines readily available online, most men admit they aren't knowledgeable enough about whether their online pharmacy is real. Despite this, men are still likely to engage in risky buying behavior online, such as buying medicines from a pharmacy advertised by spam. Men with ED are also more trusting of pharmacy websites that appear to be based in Canada than those based in other countries, despite the fact that many of these sites are not actually based in Canada and are likely selling counterfeit medicines.

"The problem isn't that consumers are reckless. The problem is that counterfeiters are very smart, and are taking advantage of consumer trust," said Mr. Carmen Catizone, executive director

of the NABP. "When consumers buy medicine online without first checking that their Internet pharmacy is real, they are putting both their physical and financial health at risk. The good news is that it's actually very easy to safely buy medicine online, if you know what to look for."

To help consumers protect themselves, Mr. Catizone's organization, NABP, has partnered with Pfizer Inc. to launch a new YouTube channel: www.YouTube.com/SpotFakeMeds. The videos feature anti-counterfeiting experts who describe the risks of buying counterfeit medicines, and provide information about how to find safe online pharmacies. The YouTube channel does contain information about a treatment option for erectile dysfunction.

Consumers can also go to NABP's website, www.AWARErx.org, for easy-to-understand information about the dangers of counterfeit medicines and tips on how to select an online pharmacy. Through www.AWARErx.org, people with valid prescriptions from their healthcare professionals can link to a list of online pharmacies accredited by VIPPS® (Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites). VIPPS is an accreditation given by NABP.

"The takeaway for consumers is that buying medicine online can be just as safe as buying other kinds of products," said Mr. Catizone. "There are plenty of online pharmacies based in the U.S. that are selling FDA-approved medicines, and there is one easy way to be sure that your pharmacy is one of them. Simply put: Make sure it's on the VIPPs list."

This information was provided by Pfizer Inc.