

Ask The Experts

Taking The Best Medicine

(NAPSA)—The U.S. has the most advanced and safest health-care system in the world. But how does the government ensure the millions of supplements, over-the-counter medicines and prescription products Americans use are effective? It uses the United States Pharmacopeia (USP).

The USP sets standards for prescription and over-the-counter drugs, dietary supplements, healthcare technologies and ingredients. Whether it's an aspirin, a vitamin or a prescription drug, USP standards ensure product identity, strength, quality and purity. That helps consumers know that the products they use will perform as expected.

How do you know if a drug or over-the-counter medication you take meets USP standards?

Within the United States, USP standards are officially recognized in the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. This act is law and is enforceable by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). U.S. pharmaceutical manufacturers must comply with USP standards.

Some pharmaceutical and dietary supplement manufacturers place the USP initials on their product containers to inform customers their products meet USP standards.

What are the other USP public health programs?

USP has a Dietary Supplement Verification Program (DSVP). It was developed in response to the public's increasing concerns about the quality of dietary supplements in the marketplace.



The United States Pharmacopeia works to maintain the quality of over-the-counter and prescription drugs.

Through compliance testing and document review, adherence to good manufacturing principles, and post-marketing surveillance, DSVP is designed to help ensure that dietary supplement products contain the declared ingredients in the stated quantities.

Products that have been certified under DSVP are entitled to bear the special USP DSVP mark. Further information about DSVP is available at www.usp-dsvp.org.

USP also operates two medication error reporting, tracking, and analysis programs: the Medication Errors Reporting (MER) Program (operated in collaboration with the Institute for Safe Medication Practices) and MedMARxSM. MedMARx is an Internet-accessible database for hospitals to report and track medication errors anonymously. Further information about MedMARx is available at www.medmarx.com.

For more information about USP, visit www.usp.org.