

LEGAL VERSUS ILLEGAL INTERNET PHARMACIES

As we just covered in the above summaries, just because a pharmacy has a market over the Internet does not mean it is illegitimate or illegal. There are online pharmacies that are legitimate. According to WebMD, there are four signs to look for in a legitimate pharmacy website:

1. **U.S. location and license.** The state boards of pharmacy have high standards for the licensing of pharmacies.
2. **Verified pharmacy practice site.** The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy® (NABP) inspects Internet pharmacies and awards a Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites™ (VIPPS) seal to those that meet its criteria.
3. **Prescription required.** Any trustworthy pharmacy will insist on a prescription from a health care provider who has seen you in person.
4. **Real people on the phone.** You should be able to talk with a human being, including a licensed pharmacist, to answer questions about your prescription.¹

Regarding the second point, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy has a process to inspect and award its VIPPS seal. The good news is that the NABP has reviewed over 10,000 Internet pharmacy sites. The bad news is that only 3% of these Internet sites appear to be in compliance with pharmacy laws and practice standards. Ninety-seven percent of the Internet sites reviewed by NABP were deemed not in compliance with pharmacy laws and practice standards!² No wonder the FDA is very concerned about these sites.

To earn a VIPPS seal, an Internet pharmacy must comply with the survey and licensing requirements of every state in which it dispenses pharmaceutical drugs. The Internet pharmacy must also meet the national standards of pharmacy practice, demonstrate compliance through stated policies and procedures with privacy standards, and authentication and security standards and requirements, and have meaningful consultation between patients and pharmacists, among others.³

WHY DO INTERNET PHARMACIES EXIST?

Illegal Internet pharmacies are easy to set up. One law enforcement person in the Northeast said they are like dandelions popping up in an