

Fertility Medications and Online Pharmacies

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is a specialty pharmacy?

Specialty pharmacies are those that have a specific focus on high cost medicines that are utilized for the treatment and management of complex diseases, such as cancer, infertility, genetic diseases and others. These pharmacies often offer unique services to their patients to assist in the management of the disease, including dispensing, therapeutic care, and medication compliance. Often, specialty pharmacies have websites where patients can find more information on the services they offer, request a quote and start the ordering process, and refill existing prescriptions.

2. What is an online pharmacy?

Online pharmacies operate sell medications to patients via the internet. Online pharmacies are *different* than mail-service pharmacies whose services are provided as a benefit through an insurance company (e.g. using OptumRx® to mail a 90-day supply of medicines covered by insurance). Online pharmacies typically do not accept insurance; rather patients pay out-of-pocket for medicines which are sent directly to the patient. Also, unlike a traditional storefront pharmacy or a specialty pharmacy, online pharmacies rarely offer a meaningful opportunity for patient-provider consultation prior to the medications being shipped to patients.

3. Is it legal in the U.S. to order prescription fertility medications from an online pharmacy?

Technically yes, it is legal so long as patients order U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved medicines from a pharmacy licensed in their state. However, only 3% of all online pharmacies comply with all applicable laws and safety standards. If choosing to buy online, patients should verify before they buy by going to www.BuySafeRx.Pharmacy and clicking “Find Safe Online Pharmacies.”

4. What are some of the benefits of using specialty pharmacies for fertility medicines?

As compared to online pharmacies, patients are able to discuss treatment plans with a licensed pharmacist, receive education or counseling services, or further benefit from treatment monitoring. Patients can also be rest assured that they will receive the medication from a reputable source and as prescribed by their doctor in the intended form, quality, potency and dosage. Often, illegal online pharmacies do not have a licensed pharmacist on hand to discuss a treatment plan or answer any questions that a patient may have prior to treatment.

5. Could patients receive substandard, counterfeit or expired fertility medicine online?

Yes. Illegal online pharmacies have been found to repackage and resell substandard and expired products. In many instances, these criminals will reuse old packaging, vials and other related items in the sale of counterfeit goods. Some counterfeiters will also create the labels and packaging for the goods in an effort to mimic the legitimate products.

6. What are the risks of ordering prescription fertility medications online?

When buying from illegal or unverified online pharmacies there is no way to know:

- **What the medicines actually contain.** The products may contain either too much, too little or no active pharmaceutical ingredients, or have the wrong dosage. Medical devices may be faulty or even hazardous. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell the legitimacy of the product simply by looking at the packaging or medication itself.
- **The safety and efficacy of the medicine.** The conditions under which the medicines were manufactured, stored, and transported, creating opportunities for the product to become degraded, ineffective or unsafe. As many fertility medicines need to be kept at a certain

temperature to be effective, any deviation from this standard protocol, known as a cold-chain, puts the patient at risk of harm or receiving no therapeutic benefit.

- **If the medicine is producing a therapeutic benefit.** Dealing with multiple treatment options and cycles is difficult enough -- often it's a process of elimination. With the significantly increased risk of uncertain levels of active (and/or correct) pharmaceutical ingredients, it makes the process of eliminating non-successful treatment options all the more difficult.
- **Where the medicines actually come from.** FDA has found that 85% of the time medicines sold by "Canadian" online pharmacies actually come from countries *other than* Canada. FDA has also found that medicines sold by illegal online drug sellers are often sourced in India, Russia or China and not manufactured in facilities approved or vetted by the FDA. These medicines do not meet the quality standard that ensures safety and effectiveness.
- **How many times the medicine has changed hands along the way.** Change of ownership creates multiple opportunities for falsified or substandard drugs to enter the supply chain and be shipped to patients.

7. Is there a risk of identity theft and financial fraud when using an illegal online pharmacy?

Yes. Buying from illegal online pharmacies places patients at risk for financial or identity theft and fraud. Unfortunately, consumers typically have little recourse as many of these criminals operate overseas outside of U.S. jurisdiction.

8. Are websites like IVFMeds.com, fertilitydrugsonline.com, ivf.towndrugstore.com, and ivfprescriptions.com safe?

No. These and other similar websites are not legitimate online pharmacies because: (1) they offer worldwide shipping of prescription products in violation of numerous countries' applicable laws; and (2) there is no evidence the site has a valid pharmacy licenses in any jurisdictions. If the online seller is willing to cut corners and not comply with applicable laws in these ways, it is hard to believe the seller would otherwise comply with drug safety laws and practices.

9. How can patients stay safe online?

- **If buying medicines online, ALWAYS:**
 - Visit www.BuySafeRx.pharmacy to verify before buying medicine online.
 - Look for **".pharmacy"** in website addresses. These websites have been approved as safe and legal through the .Pharmacy Verified Websites Program, which is operated by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy.
- **NEVER use online pharmacies that:**
 - Don't require a valid prescription;
 - Ship from foreign countries into the U.S.;
 - Offer "too good to be true" prices; or
 - Don't have a licensed pharmacist on-staff with whom you can consult.