

**New Survey Reveals Dangerous Disconnect in American Perceptions of Online Pharmacies**  
***More Consumers Buy Medicine Online Despite Not Knowing the Risks of Illegal Internet Drug Sellers***

**WASHINGTON – October 19, 2020** – According to a new [national survey](#) the [Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies](#) (ASOP Global) commissioned from [Abacus Data](#), the COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating an already growing trend toward the digitalization of the healthcare industry, including increased utilization of telemedicine and the purchase of medications online. Yet, a majority of Americans do not understand the prevalence of illegal online pharmacies or their inherent dangers, putting their health at risk.

The new poll shows that more than one-third of Americans (35%) have now used an online pharmacy to purchase medication, up from 23% in [2013](#). In 2020, 16% of Americans report increasing their use of online pharmacies. Of those who have bought prescription medication online, 31% did so for the first time in 2020 because of the pandemic and 72% indicate that they plan to do so again in the future. Across all demographics, the decision to purchase prescription medications from an online pharmacy is driven primarily by convenience (62%) and cost (56%). Younger, urban, well-educated and wealthier middle-class Americans are most likely to buy medicine online, likely driven by the fact that medicines sold online are typically paid for by consumers out-of-pocket and not through insurance.

At the same time, actions by U.S. Food and Drug Administration and U.S. Department of Justice show that criminals are exploiting coronavirus fears with thousands of new malicious websites peddling fake or counterfeit cures and treatments or misinformation, elevating the potential threat to consumer safety online.

“Just because an online pharmacy website appears in your search results or social feed does not mean that the site is legitimate or safe. In fact, the vast majority of online drug sellers operate illegally, often posing as safe ‘Canadian’ pharmacies,” said John Hertig, PharmD, CPPS, FASHP Associate Professor, Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences and ASOP Global Board President.

The survey findings demonstrate that American consumers believe they are more knowledgeable regarding online pharmacies than they are in reality. Further, most are unaware of the risks associated with their use or how to find legitimate sources versus rogue outlets, exposing millions more U.S. consumers to the risk of potential fraud and criminality online.

**Key Findings on Consumer Awareness Gap:**

- While 6 in 10 Americans report an awareness of online pharmacies, nearly three-in-four (71%) have not experienced or heard about the risks of buying prescription medications from online pharmacies.
- Thirty-seven percent see little inherent risk in the online purchase and only 15% believe purchasing prescription medications online is “very risky.”
- Half of those surveyed believe that regardless of the level of risk, the benefits provided make an online prescription purchase worthwhile and would consider purchasing medication online for everything from medicines for chronic conditions such as blood pressure and cholesterol to COVID-related products and specialty medications like chemotherapies.

The poll also reveals that, while most Americans turn to their healthcare professionals (38% doctor/physician, 28% pharmacist, 12% nurse) for help locating online pharmacies, only half of survey respondents report that they have talked with their provider about the potential risks associated with buying medicines online.

While this level of consultation is a positive trend compared to ASOP Global's [2017 survey](#), in which only 11% of consumers in Indiana said they had discussed risks with a healthcare provider, nearly a third (29%) of Americans indicated that they are likely to make purchases from an online pharmacy without consulting a healthcare provider at all.

“The survey’s findings underscore the critical role that healthcare providers play in educating consumers about how to buy medicines online safely. The risks are real and our patients need to beware of illegal online drug sellers who may be offering counterfeit, substandard, or even deadly medications,” said Ilisa Bernstein, PharmD, JD, FAPhA, Senior Vice President of Pharmacy Practice and Government Affairs, American Pharmacists Association (APhA) and ASOP Global Board member.

Prioritizing patient health and safety online and off, ASOP Global provides free [tools and resources](#) that healthcare providers and consumers can use to learn more about how to stay safe and save money buying medicines online.

“ASOP Global’s survey results should further compel policymaker attention to this patient safety issue in order to stop illegal online pharmacies peddling false COVID-19 treatments and other unsafe medicines,” said Hertig. “Data has demonstrated that Americans are and will continue to buy medicines online without awareness of the risks and tools to buy safely. It is now incumbent on government and all other stakeholders to do more in response. ASOP Global stands ready to support policymakers and public health leaders in this call to action.”

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## **ABOUT ASOP GLOBAL**

The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP Global), a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. with activities in U.S., Canada, Europe, Latin America and Asia, is dedicated to protecting consumers around the world, ensuring safe access to medications, and combating illegal online drug sellers.

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

This survey was conducted by Abacus Data with 1,500 American adults from July 24 to 26, 2020. A random sample of panelists were invited to complete the survey from a set of partner panels based on the Lucid exchange platform. The data were weighted according to census data to ensure that the sample matches the USA’s population to age, gender, educational attainment, and region. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is +/- 2.51%.