

New Survey: As More Americans Buy Meds on the Internet, Most Prioritize Cost & Convenience Over Safety

Dangerous misconceptions make nearly half of consumers willing to buy from unregulated online pharmacies or explicitly prohibited foreign sources in exchange for easy access and lower prices

WASHINGTON – July 12, 2021 – According to a new [national survey](#) the [ASOP Global Foundation](#) commissioned from [Abacus Data](#), nearly half of American consumers are willing to risk threats to their health by purchasing medications from unregulated online sources for the sake of more convenience and lower prices. Further, U.S drug importation policies give consumers a false sense of security, leading many to misbelieve that all Canadian medicines sold online are safe and legitimate. Alarming, more than one-third of consumers polled say they would knowingly ignore explicit government prohibitions from buying medicines from Canadian online pharmacies because of their misperceptions that they can safely access cheaper medications from sources abroad.

As predicted by ASOP's similar survey from [June 2020](#), the demand for convenient, lower-cost medications sold online has been accelerated by COVID-19, and this trend will continue post-pandemic. This surge in demand has led to an explosion of [thousands of new, malicious websites](#) designed to defraud patients and elevates consumers' exposure to potential health risks. Fully [95%](#) of the roughly [35,000 online pharmacies worldwide](#) operate illegally, putting American lives at risk by selling counterfeit, substandard, and sometimes [deadly medicines](#).

"Clearly, awareness of health and safety risks aren't enough to overcome powerful purchasing drivers like convenience and cost, and consumers are willing to roll the dice when it comes to their safety," said Ilisa Bernstein, PharmD, JD, FAPhA, Senior Vice President of Pharmacy Practice and Government Affairs, American Pharmacists Association (APhA), and ASOP Global Board member. "As trusted messengers, health care professionals play a critical role in directing Americans to legitimate online pharmacies and resources that help patients stay safe and save money."

Though more than one-third of Americans are now aware of patient harms linked to online prescription medication purchases, up 9% from 2020, the new poll finds consumers still hold dangerous misperceptions about online pharmacies. In fact, 45% erroneously believe that there are safety nets in place to ensure all websites offering health care services and/or prescription medications are safe, verified, and approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or have state regulatory approval.

The new survey also shows that Americans are willing to disregard drug importation prohibitions to access more convenient and affordable medicines online. Policies like the FDA's Importation of Prescription Drugs [Final Rule](#), which allows for the *wholesale* importation of drugs from Canada, may be creating a false sense of security about the safety, access, and savings offered when buying alleged Canadian medicines online. The new poll finds that 34% say knowing that the rule explicitly prohibits individual Americans from buying medicines from Canadian online pharmacies won't change their behavior. Even after being told about the law's prohibition, consumers are still likely to consider buying from a Canadian online pharmacy. Further, the survey also shows that consumers don't know how to distinguish safe and legal sites from those operating in violation of U.S. law. Taken together, this means importation policies could have the effect of driving Americans to unregulated, unsafe online pharmacies.

"ASOP Global Foundation's survey results demand action from policymakers who must reform drug importation policies to safeguard consumers from illegal online pharmacies," said John Hertig, PharmD, MS, CPPS, FASHP Associate Professor, Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, and ASOP Global Board President. "To truly protect public health and patient safety, lawmakers and the Biden Administration need to implement effective legislative and regulatory policy solutions that address internet accountability."

OTHER KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY INCLUDE:

- 42% of Americans have used an online pharmacy to buy medicines for themselves or someone in their care - up seven points from just a year ago.
- 54% see risks to using prescription medication purchased online - a six-point increase from ASOP Global's 2020 survey.
- 38% of Americans - up nine percent since 2020 - are familiar with an event where someone received a substandard or counterfeit prescription medication from an online pharmacy.
- Nearly half of Americans would be open to purchasing prescription medicines from an online source *not sanctioned* by the FDA if it increased their access, decreased their cost, and provided convenience to more medicines.
- 72% of Americans believe verified, safe websites selling prescription medications should appear first in search results or be clearly identified as legitimate, yet no law requires this today. This is particularly alarming, as 1 in 5 Americans *exclusively* rely on online search platforms and social media platforms to locate the online pharmacies they visit.
- 50% of Americans who have previously purchased medication online say they would likely use a website to order prescription medicines without consulting a health care provider. That number climbs to 59% for those who bought medicine online for the first time this year because of COVID-19.

The ASOP Global Foundation and advocacy organization the [Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies](#) stand ready to work with policymakers to reform [drug importation](#) policies to protect patients from illegal online drug sellers masquerading as "Canadian pharmacies" and address [internet accountability](#) with no-cost solutions that already exist, like restoring [WHOIS data transparency](#), mandating registries and registrars [lock and suspend](#) suspicious domain names, and reforming [Section 230](#), and by endorsing bipartisan legislation, such as the [PACT Act](#), [SHOP SAFE Act](#), and [INFORM Consumers Act](#). The organizations also provide free [tools and resources](#) for health care providers and consumers to learn more about staying safe and saving money buying medicines online.

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ABOUT ASOP GLOBAL FOUNDATION

The ASOP Global Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable, nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing the growing public health threat of illegal online drug sellers, concentrating its activities in research and education to inform consumers and policymakers.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Abacus Data conducted this survey with 1,500 American adults from May 19 to 21, 2021. 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%.