

ASOP Global Principles for the Safe Use of Artificial Intelligence

The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP Global) is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting consumers around the world, ensuring safe access to medications, and combating illegal online drug sellers. The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology has created both opportunity and challenge in ensuring lawful, safe online pharmacies are distinguished from illegal sources. Without the proper guardrails, AI can elevate the level of risk consumers face when looking for prescription drugs online, including suggesting websites which offer counterfeit, substandard, or unapproved medications. In fact, recent research published in *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance* found that AI-generated searches recommended links to illegal online pharmacies 19% of the time on Bing and 13% of the time on Google, including sites that were selling controlled substances.¹

Because of these risks, ASOP Global is establishing principles for the use of AI that aim to safeguard public health and protect consumers from illegal prescription drug sellers.

ASOP Global Principles for the Safe Use of AI

Algorithm Transparency and Explanation

- Developers and operators of AI systems must provide transparency and clarity to consumers on the functioning of their algorithms and how their data is used to either train these algorithms and personalized user experiences or ingested by these systems to make recommendations.
- This includes explaining how data, including consumer information, is used to make decisions and recommendations and clearly outlining what steps they are taking to avoid suggesting unlawful websites or content.

Safety of AI Recommendations and Accountability

- AI systems recommending sources for medicines online must have systems in place to ensure they prioritize returning legal and safe results to consumers.
- Any recommendations made by AI should be based on validated data sources. Large Language Models (LLMs) that develop these recommendations should be informed by credible, authoritative data sources.

¹ Ashraf A, Mackey T, Fittler A

Search Engines and Generative Artificial Intelligence Integration: Public Health Risks and Recommendations to Safeguard Consumers Online

JMIR Public Health Surveill 2024;10:e53086

URL: <https://publichealth.jmir.org/2024/1/e53086>

DOI: 10.2196/53086

- There should also be a clear means to report offending websites, offering an opportunity for accountability and recourse for recommendations made by AI systems when recommending sources for purchasing prescription drugs and other health products online or offering medical advice.

Compliance with Regulatory Standards

- To protect patient safety, AI systems recommending sources for prescription drugs and other health products online must return results that comply with relevant state, federal, and international laws, regulatory standards, and pharmacy practice guidelines.
- This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring adherence to licensing requirements, accreditation standards of the [National Association of Boards of Pharmacy \(NABP\)](#), verification checking websites such as [LegitScript](#), and any applicable consumer protection laws.

Human Oversight and Intervention

- Humans must continue to have regular oversight and retain the ability to intervene as AI adoption grows and technology advances. Recommendations that involve patient risk, like those suggesting where consumers can purchase medications or other health products online, or offering medical advice, also need to involve human judgment and active content moderation to ensure patient safety.

Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation

- Regular monitoring, updating, and evaluation of AI systems should be conducted to assess performance, identify vulnerabilities, and address any emerging risks promptly. This includes monitoring for changes in patterns of illegal online drug or health product sales, offering inappropriate medical advice, and adapting AI systems accordingly.

Healthcare Community and Consumer Education

- Consumers, healthcare providers, and regulators should all be educated about the capabilities and risks associated with the broader integration of AI into health information-seeking and healthcare decision-making. Doing so will ensure we continue to foster a culture of safety and responsibility throughout the healthcare system.