

Combating Illegal Online Pharmacies and Counterfeit Medicines To Make The Internet Safer For Patients

About ASOP Global: The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP Global) is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization dedicated to combating illegal online pharmacies and counterfeit medicines. Founded in 2009, ASOP Global's mission is to make the internet safer for patients through research, education, advocacy, and collaboration. ASOP Global's U.S.-based members include 30+ nonprofit groups, prescription discount programs, academic institutions, patient organizations, pharmaceutical manufacturers, health care providers, pharmacy organizations, shippers, payment processors, and internet security companies.

Problem:

- Roughly out of the 35,000 “online pharmacies” operating worldwide, 95% operate illegally, in violation of state and/or federal law and relevant pharmacy practice standards. Many sell medicines without requiring a prescription and operating without a pharmacy license. In some cases, the drugs offered by these sellers are substandard or counterfeit, containing little or no active ingredient.
- **Drivers of Online Purchases:** Restrictions in access to prescription medications—whether due to policy barriers, cost constraints, provider access challenges, or drug shortages—drive unsuspecting consumers to seek alternative options on the internet.
- **Patient Safety Risk:** The rise in patients turning to online pharmacies comes at a cost to patient health and safety: 24% of Americans who had purchased medicine online report having received harmful, counterfeit, or substandard product.¹
- **Lack of Consumer Awareness:** Unfortunately, less than 5% of Americans know how to find a safe, verified online pharmacy.²
- **High Demand for GLP-1 Drugs:** GLP-1 drugs for diabetes and weight loss are in particularly high demand, driven by the significant results they deliver. Underregulated telehealth platforms and med spas have become increasingly common sources of GLP-1 medications, often bypassing traditional safety checks and pharmacy safeguards.
- Beyond GLP-1 drugs, the risks posed by illegal online drug sellers extend to all classes of medicines. Illegal online sellers sell counterfeit and unapproved cancer treatments, HIV medicines, controlled substances, hormones, and more.
- **National Security Threat:** The threat from illegal prescription drugs often comes from foreign actors and American adversaries, reinforcing that this problem is a national security threat. Foreign actors in China, Russia, Mexico, Turkey and elsewhere prey on American patients.^{3 4 5 6} These foreign actors take advantage of the American's overwhelming demand for medicines, opacity of the internet, the ability to hide in foreign jurisdictions, and porous U.S. borders to profit from the online sale of mass quantities of counterfeit drugs, dangerous controlled substances, and illegal API used in compounded drugs offered online.

Policy Solutions

To date, U.S. policy has failed to protect Americans from the widespread internet drug sellers who profit at the expense of patients' safety. However, supporting specific policies at the federal level could help curtail this online threat. ASOP Global's online patient safety policy priorities include:

- Support the policy in [FDA's FY2026 legislative proposals](#) that would **allow mandatory destruction of imported products** that pose serious public health risks, eliminating the current option to export them.
- **Support report language included in the FY2026 Ag-FDA appropriations** Senate and House bills which address counterfeit medicines, illegal imports of unapproved new drugs, and enforcements of statutory limits on compounded copies when FDA-approved medicines are available.
- Support the proposal in [FDA's FY2026 legislative proposals](#) that provides FDA with **new authorities regarding certificates of analysis for active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs)** used in drug manufacturing, including human drug compounding, must identify the name, address, and unique facility identifier of the API's original manufacturer.
- **Protecting Patients from Deceptive Drug Ads Online Act** to address false and misleading prescription drug promotions by having FDA issue warning letters and fines to influencers and telehealth companies that engage in misleading advertising practices.
- **Cooper Davis and Devin Norring Act** which requires electronic communication service providers and remote computing service providers to report knowledge of various drug-related offenses (e.g., unlawful distribution of a counterfeit controlled substance, fentanyl, or methamphetamine) to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

1 Supra note 1.

2 Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP Global). (n.d.) Online Pharmacy Consumer Behavior and Perception Survey. Available at: <https://buysaferx.pharmacy/public-awareness-campaigns/drug-importation/factsheets/online-pharmacy-consumer-behavior-and-perception-survey/>

3 IQVIA Institute for Human Data Science (2023) Assessing the impact of illegal online pharmacies in the U.S.: Sales, volume and adverse events. IQVIA Institute for Human Data Science, in collaboration with Translucent Datalab and IE University. Available at: <https://www.iqviainstitute.org>

4 Gilead Sciences, Inc. et al v. Meritain Health, Inc. et al, No. 1:24-cv-03566-JRR (D. Md. June 24, 2025). Memorandum Opinion signed by Judge Julie Rebecca Rubin.

5 Eban, K. (2024) Why Counterfeit Ozempic Is a Global-Growth Industry. Vanity Fair, 4 June. Available at: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/counterfeit-ozempic-global-growth-industry>

6 U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York. (2024) U.S. Attorney announces charges against 18 defendants in scheme to manufacture and distribute millions of deadly counterfeit pharmaceuticals through fake online pharmacies. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/us-attorney-announces-charges-against-18-defendants-scheme-manufacture-and-distribute>