

Counterfeit GLP-1 Drugs Are Flooding the Market and Putting Patients at Risk

By Ilisa Bernstein, ASOP Global Board Member; President, Bernstein Rx Solutions

While there are safe, legal ways to buy medicine online, a significant number of online sellers operate outside the law. Indeed, [ninety-five percent](#) of online pharmacies are not compliant with regulatory standards, contributing to a vast, unregulated marketplace where counterfeit and substandard medicines can thrive. As demand for GLP-1 therapies surges, some bad actors are exploiting the drug's visibility by marketing and selling products that may be counterfeit, substandard, or otherwise unsafe, putting consumers at risk.

[Illegitimate online sellers](#) and unlicensed distributors often operate outside of basic safety standards, putting patients at risk of receiving medicines that may be [counterfeit, substandard, falsified, or misbranded](#). Patients may receive medications that contain [impurities, incorrect or inconsistent dosages](#), harmful or unknown ingredients, are manufactured in unregulated and unsanitary conditions, or are entirely falsified with no active ingredient at all.

Recent [enforcement actions](#) and [warnings](#) from the United States and global health officials about knockoff GLP-1 drugs underscore the urgency of this growing public health concern.

According to the [ASOP Global Foundation's 2025 Consumer Behavior Survey](#), 56% of U.S. adults report seeing GLP-1 ads frequently, on a daily or weekly basis. At the same time, 14% of U.S. adults have taken GLP-1 medications, and among them, one in four (25%) report purchasing these medicines online.

This convergence of high demand and aggressive digital marketing is creating fertile ground for bad actors. Notably, [47%](#) of people who have purchased prescription medicines online report taking a medicine without being fully confident it was as safe as one from a local pharmacy. Additionally, [27%](#) report receiving substandard or counterfeit medicine or experiencing harm. Adding to these risks, [65%](#) of U.S. adults falsely believe that all websites offering online prescription or health services are reviewed or approved by the FDA or state regulators.

The Counterfeit Threat

Today's counterfeit drug operations are increasingly sophisticated. Many mimic legitimate pharmacies, sometimes even copying manufacturer websites, and operate thousands of online storefronts with polished branding and targeted digital advertising designed to build trust and evade detection, according to NABP's [RogueRx Activity Report](#).

These products are often marketed as lower-cost or equivalent alternatives, blurring the line between FDA-approved medicines and unverified, potentially dangerous substitutes. Common tactics include:

- Claims such as "same active ingredient," "generic," or "no prescription required"

- [Social media ads](#) and telehealth-style funnels that direct consumers to purchase quickly online
- Messaging that downplays risk while emphasizing convenience and affordability
- Pretending to be a legitimate pharmacy, when it is not a pharmacy at all

For patients seeking access to in-demand GLP-1 therapies, these signals can be difficult to distinguish from legitimate offerings, and products sold through illegal channels are not subject to the regulatory safeguards that ensure safety, quality, and effectiveness.

These risks are not hypothetical. The ASOP Global Foundation survey found that [40%](#) of individuals who purchased GLP-1 medications online report either receiving substandard or counterfeit products or being harmed by medications bought online. This is nearly double the rate reported by online purchasers of other types of medicines.

Patient Education and Awareness

As new GLP-1 therapies enter the market, patients, more than ever before, must remain vigilant when considering online purchases of these or any prescription medication. For Americans, this includes:

- Obtaining prescriptions from state licensed healthcare providers
- Using only state-licensed pharmacies
- Verifying the medication source before buying via www.safe.pharmacy or www.legitscript.com
- Consulting a healthcare professional before purchasing medications online
- Being cautious of products marketed as research use only chemicals or do-it-yourself kits online, which are often promoted as alternatives to GLP-1 medications but may be substandard, improperly formulated, or unsafe

These steps help ensure that patients receive medicines that meet appropriate standards.

Patients should not have to question whether their medicine is safe or authentic, yet the reality is that increased exposure, rising demand, and easy online access are converging in ways that put patients at greater risk.

The good news is that you can avoid getting unsafe and ineffective GLP-1 treatments—and there are clear, reliable ways to avoid exposure to harm. Taking a few extra steps to verify your source helps ensure your treatment is exactly what it should be. Before purchasing, patients should confirm that the pharmacy is licensed, requires a valid prescription, and is verified by a trusted program, and avoid sites offering unusually low prices or selling medications without a prescription.