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ASOP Global Urges USTR to Strengthen Action Against Illegal Online Drug Sellers

Comments highlight growing patient safety threat and call for greater accountability across the digital ecosystem

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 8, 2026) — The [Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies \(ASOP Global\)](#) submitted [comments](#) to the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) urging stronger action against online sellers illegally offering medicines across the internet as part of USTR's 2026 Review of Notorious Markets for Counterfeiting and Piracy.

As more Americans turn to the internet to purchase prescription medicines, the scale and potential impact of illegal online drug sales continue to grow. Per [research](#) from the [ASOP Global Foundation](#), 38% of U.S. adults report purchasing prescription medicines online, and among those online purchasers, 55% now buy all or most of their prescriptions online. But as more people turn to online pharmacies, so do the risks: the same research shows 27% of online purchasers report having received counterfeit or substandard medicine or being harmed by medicine purchased online, up from 24% in 2023. Yet 65% of U.S. adults falsely believe that all websites offering prescription medicines are reviewed or approved by FDA or state regulators.

"Illegal online drug sellers are not simply infringing intellectual property rights. They are putting patients directly at risk," said Dr. Leigh Verbois, Board Chair of ASOP Global. "As consumers increasingly turn to the internet and emerging technologies to access medicines, we need stronger accountability across the online ecosystem to help prevent dangerous products from reaching patients."

ASOP Global's comments highlight several indicators of the growing threat:

- The [National Association of Boards of Pharmacy \(NABP\)](#)'s Not Recommended List now exceeds 40,000 domain names, none operated by a pharmacy licensed in any U.S. state. In NABP's published reviews, [95% to 97%](#) of websites selling prescription drugs to U.S. consumers operated out of compliance with state or federal law or pharmacy practice standards.
- A 2024 peer-reviewed study found that [42%](#) of online pharmacy search results for semaglutide led to illegal sellers, with all purchased products from those sellers considered to be probable substandard or falsified medicines.
- The ASOP Global Foundation's [Rx Watchdog](#) monitors the online marketplace for metabolic and oncology drugs, tracking how these products are offered for sale by seemingly noncompliant sources across websites and social media platforms. During its first data collection period, Rx Watchdog identified 41,496 product listings across 1,035 domains and 1,751 social media posts offering FDA-approved medications, investigational drugs, and emerging molecules. This included 20,983 listings across 330 domains for peptide molecules that cannot currently be legally compounded, as well as

1,906 listings for retatrutide, an investigational drug that has not been approved by the FDA. The findings illustrate the scale and evolving nature of the illegal online market for medicines.

- Much of the internet infrastructure used by illegal drug sellers is provided by U.S.-based companies that are subject to U.S. law and well-positioned to act, yet domain registrars have been reluctant to act on complaints involving sellers of “research use only” products and investigational drugs.

ASOP Global urged USTR to continue identifying illegal online drug sellers in the Notorious Markets List and to recognize that their harms extend beyond intellectual property to public health. ASOP Global is urging USTR to take a coordinated approach to the threat by strengthening collaboration among USTR, FDA and other relevant federal agencies; pressing domain registrars to adopt proactive policies, including safeguards against repeat offenders; supporting consumer education on how to identify legitimate online pharmacies; and leveraging tools such as Rx Watchdog to identify emerging threats and repeat offenders.

Lastly, USTR should recognize AI-facilitated illegal online drug sales in its Notorious Markets evaluations, warning that AI can generate new fraudulent websites faster than regulators can shut them down.

“Protecting patients requires a coordinated approach,” Verbois said. “No single agency, platform or organization can address this challenge alone. We need stronger collaboration and accountability across the digital ecosystem.”

Read the full comments [here](#).

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About ASOP Global

The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP Global), a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., with activities in the 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. Learn more at buysaferx.pharmacy.