



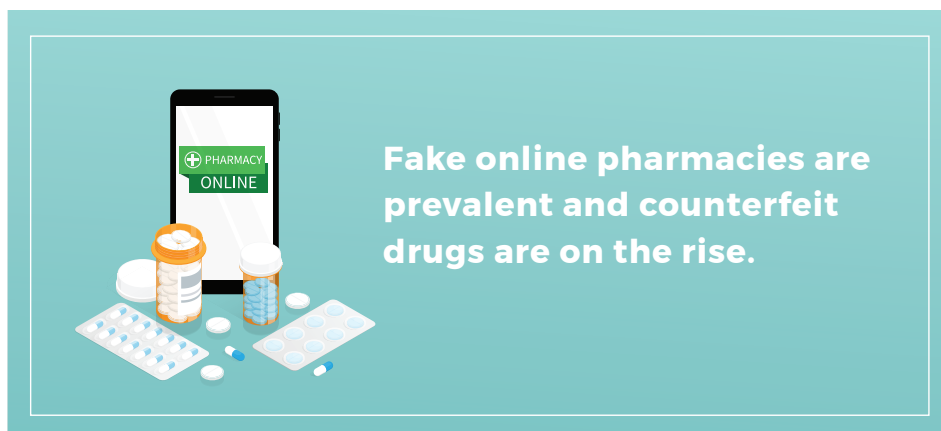
CONSUMER ALERT:

Don't Be Fooled by Fake Online Pharmacies and Counterfeit Drugs

While you may be able to easily identify a counterfeit handbag or even money, it's not as easy to spot an illegal online pharmacy, or counterfeit prescriptions drugs and medications. An illegal or fake online pharmacy is not regulated, licensed or authorized to sell pharmaceuticals and those running the pharmacy do not have the necessary credentials to prescribe or distribute medications. While the medications may be cheaper, fake pharmacies are oftentimes schemes for identity thieves and fraudsters to obtain money illegally and gain access to your personal information. Counterfeit drugs may look like the real thing but do not contain the correct ingredients and may even contain deadly amounts of opioids or other drugs.

The number of fake pharmacies and counterfeit prescription drugs that are sold online is astonishing. A survey conducted by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy found that of the 12,000 pharmacies it analyzed, 95 percent of those pose legitimate safety concerns. According to the World Health Organization, nearly \$83 billion worth of counterfeit drugs are sold each year.

Consuming a counterfeit drug can impact you significantly and have consequences as severe as death. According to www.Fraud.org, counterfeit prescription drugs laced with the opioid fentanyl, which is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times more than morphine, has been found in 48 states and killed people in 33 of them. Additionally, because these medications are not tested and approved, the amount of the active ingredients may be inaccurate, or it may not be added at all, which means the medicine will not treat your condition, as intended.



It's important for you to follow these important tips to avoid being a victim:

- **Buy Medication from Legitimate Online Pharmacies** – Not all online pharmacies are illegal or illegitimate. Verify the online pharmacy by searching the site on the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy's [Safe Pharmacy](#) website.
- **Look Out for Red Flags** – If you notice any of these red flags on the site, the pharmacy may be fake and the medications could be counterfeit: allows you to buy medications without a prescription; prices significantly discounted; claims to cure chronic or severe illnesses; ships from other countries; does not have a licensed pharmacist for consultation; no address, phone number or state licensure information listed.
- **Examine the Packaging and Medications** – If the medication you receive has a different appearance or the package has been tampered with, your medication may be counterfeit. Do not take the meds and properly dispose of them by following the [Federal Drug Administration's instructions](#).
- **Report Suspicious Activity** – File a complaint on [www.Fraud.org](#), which will be shared with more than 90 law enforcement agencies for further review and investigation.

Ways to Save Money on Prescription Medicines



While online pharmacies sometimes offer cheaper prices for prescriptions, they're not always legitimate and the medications could be counterfeit. Below are a few tips to save money on prescription medications.

- **Request a Generic Version** – Ask your doctor if the generic form of your prescription is available to you. Generic forms are typically less expensive.
- **Request Samples** – Your doctor may have samples of the medicine to try before purchasing a full supply.
- **Shop Around** – Prices for prescriptions can differ by pharmacy. Call or visit several pharmacies to determine the best price before buying.
- **Request an Extended Prescription Period** – Some insurance companies only require you to pay one copay for a longer medication supply

period. For instance, if you can pay one copay for a 90-day supply instead of 3 separate copays for 3 30-day supplies, you will save money.

- **Look for Discounts and Coupons** – Many websites and organizations offer discounts on prescription medications, i.e. [GoodRx](#), [RefillWise](#) and more.
- **Patient Assistance Programs (PAP)** – PAPs provide financial assistance to consumers who do not have insurance or prescription drug coverage (specific qualifications must be met). [RxAssist](#) is a Patient Assistance Program Center where you can search for specific programs and criteria. [NeedyMeds](#) also provides information on the available PAPs.
- **Pharmaceutical Manufacturer Assistance** – Some pharmaceutical companies run assistance programs, as well. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) offers the [Medicine Assistance Tool \(MAT\)](#) to provide consumers with resources to help afford prescription drugs, including Patient Assistance Programs, co-pay assistance programs, discount cards, and other helpful resources.
- **Nonprofit Assistance** –
 - **The Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF)** provides case management services, a co-pay relief program, a national financial resource directory, and financial aid for persons with chronic or life-threatening diseases.
 - **The National Council on Aging's 84 Benefits Enrollment Centers (BECs)** help low-income consumers, Medicare recipients, and people with disabilities access programs that pay for health care, food, and more.

To learn more about how to avoid fake online pharmacies and counterfeit drugs, please visit the National Consumers League's website - www.Fraud.org – and view its [infographic](#).

www.MyFloridaCFO.com/Division/ICA

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