

Lifewire: The risk behind Internet drug ads

by Ven_Griva

Internet advertisements for prescription drugs sold at prices lower than those at your local pharmacy are certainly tempting.

But the U.S. Food and Drug Administration wants to warn all Americans that succumbing to that temptation could have serious consequences.

A recent FDA alert cautions American to beware of counterfeit drugs sold on 24 related Web sites and illustrates the potential for harm. Tests have shown that some prescriptions filled online from these sellers contain a different drug than advertised, or are pills made only of starch and talc.

Three times recently, the FDA received information that counterfeit versions of Xenical 120 mg capsules, a drug made by Hoffmann-La Roche Inc., were sold to consumers from two different Web sites. Xenical is an FDA-approved drug used to help obese people lose weight and maintain weight loss.

None of the capsules ordered off the Web sites contained orlistat, the active ingredient in authentic Xenical. Laboratory analysis conducted by Roche and submitted to the FDA confirmed that one capsule contained subutramine, a weight-loss drug manufactured by Abbott Laboratories.

While subutramine is prescribed to help people lose weight and maintain that loss, it is not a safe substitute for Xenical, the FDA says. Such a substitution can endanger consumers in two ways.

For example, sibutramine can react with other prescription drugs in a way that is different from Xenical. What's more, the dosing frequency is different for the two medicines.

Other samples of counterfeit drugs sold by the two Web sites were composed of only talc and starch, the FDA said.

Roche identified the two Web sites involved in this incident as brandpills.com and pillspharm.com. Investigation by the FDA uncovered that these Web sites are two of 24 Web sites that appear on the pharmacycall365.com home page under the "Our Websites" heading.

Four of the 24 Web sites had already been found by the FDA's Office of Criminal Investigations as having distributed counterfeit Tamiflu and Cialis.

It appears that these Web sites are operated from outside of the United States, says the FDA.

When purchasing pharmaceuticals online, consumers should be wary if there is no way to contact the Web site pharmacy by phone, if prices are dramatically lower than the competition, or if no prescription from your doctor is required. The FDA urges consumers to visit its Web site (www.fda.gov/buyonline/) before buying prescription drugs online.

The 24 Web sites appearing on pharmacycall365.com are:

- AllPills.net

- Pharmacy-4U.net

- DirectMedsMall.com

- Brandpills.com

- Emediline.com

- RX-ed.com

- RXePharm.com

- Pharmacea.org

- PillsPharm.com

- MensHealthDrugs.net

- BigXplus.net

- MediClub.md

- InterTab.de

- Pillenpharm.com

- Bigger-X.com

- PillsLand.com

- EZMEDZ.com

- UnitedMedicals.com

- Best-Medz.com

- USAPillsrx.net

- USAMedz.com

- BluePills-Rx.com

- Genericpharmacy.us

- I-Kusuri.jp

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