

## FDA: Use Caution With Online Pet Pharmacies

**The agency urges pet parents to consult with their vets before purchasing pet medications online.**

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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration urges pet owners who shop for prescription pet medicines online to make sure they know exactly what they are buying; the agency uses the acronym A.W.A.R.E. to remind consumers to use caution.

There is no foolproof way to tell if an online pharmacy is legal, according to the FDA. To help pet owners protect their pets, the agency provides the following guidelines:

**A — Ask your veterinarian.**

Before buying online, talk with a veterinarian. Some questions the FDA suggests are: “Do you trust the Internet pharmacy site?” “Have you ever worked with the company?” and “Have other clients used that site?” If any of the answers are “yes,” what were the veterinarian’s experiences?

**W — Watch for red flags.**

Some warning signs the FDA points out include: the site does not require veterinary prescriptions for prescription drug orders; the site has no licensed pharmacist available to answer questions; the site does not list physical business address, phone number or other contact information, the site is not U.S.-based; the site is not licensed by the State Board of Pharmacy where the business is based; the site does not protect your personal information.

**A — Always check for site accreditation.**

In 2009, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) created a voluntary accreditation program called Vet-VIPPS (Veterinary-Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites). This program helps identify online pharmacy sites legally selling veterinary prescription products.

**R — Report problems and suspicious online pharmacies.**

If a pet has a problem with a medicine purchased online (for example, a reaction to the medicine), first contact the medicine’s maker. To report adverse drug events directly to FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM) call 1-800-FDA-VETS. For a copy of the reporting form (FDA Form 1932a) and for more information on how to report problems, visit the FDA website

**E — Educate yourself about online pharmacies.**

The best defense against illegal online pharmacies is education. Conduct research before buying medicines online, the FDA said.