

Illegal online meds targeted in worldwide crackdown, FDA says

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More than 19,600 packages seized in U.S., including drugs for diabetes, glaucoma and impotence.

(HealthDay)—Illegal online pharmacies that sell unapproved and potentially dangerous prescription drugs to Americans were targeted this week in a worldwide operation, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said Thursday.

More than 19,600 packages containing medicines supposedly from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Great Britain were seized in the action, which involved authorities from 111 countries, the FDA said in a news release.

The packages actually contained unapproved or suspected fake drugs from countries such as China, India, Laos, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore and Taiwan, as well as Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain, the agency reported.

In the United States, officials inspected shipments at international mail facilities in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York City and seized or detained 583 packages. Many of the packages contained illegal [prescription medicines](#) that had been ordered online.

These drugs ordered by U.S. consumers included drugs such as insulin, glaucoma eye drops (bimatoprost), the pain reliever tramadol and medications for erectile dysfunction—tadalafil and sildenafil citrate. Hormone medications including estrogen and [human chorionic gonadotropin](#) were also seized.

"When consumers buy [prescription drugs](#) from outside the legitimate supply chain, they cannot know if the medicines they receive are counterfeit or even if they contain the right active ingredient in the proper dosages," Douglas Stearn, director of the FDA's Office of Enforcement and Import Operations, said in an agency news release.

Some countries have less stringent drug manufacturing standards or regulations than the United States, according to the FDA.

"Consumers have little or no legal recourse if they experience a reaction to the unregulated medication or if they receive no therapeutic benefit at all," Stearn said. "In addition to health risks, these pharmacies pose other risks to consumers, including credit card fraud, identity theft or computer viruses."

As part of the operation, the FDA also notified Internet service providers, domain name registrars and related organizations that 1,975 websites were selling products in violation of U.S. law.

Philip Walsky, acting director of the FDA's Office of Criminal Investigations, said many illegal [online pharmacies](#) use slick website templates and empty guarantees to convince U.S. consumers that the inexpensive drugs they sell are the exact same prescription drugs that are dispensed in the United States.

The FDA said it would continue to strengthen its national and international partnerships to shed light on these Internet-based fraudulent activities, he said.

More information: The FDA has more about [buying medicines online](#).

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