

Social Media Sites: The New Wild West for Illegal Online Pharmacies

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Topics: [Internet Pharmacies](#)

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy® (NABP®) published the September 2018 [Internet Drug Outlet Identification Program Progress Report for State and Federal Regulators](#).

This report shows how social media sites can lead consumers to dangerous rogue pharmacy sites through simple keyword searches.

During a four-week study, the Association performed keyword searches on multiple social media platforms and easily found posts leading to rogue pharmacy websites selling commonly counterfeited and/or abused prescription medications. On the social media platform Pinterest, for example, NABP found 66 posts promoting the sale of medications, and 38% of these posts provided links to websites selling prescription medicines illegally. Characteristics of these illegal sites include selling medicine that was not approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration, not requiring a prescription, and selling controlled substances.

Keyword searches performed on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and eBay garnered similar results. Keywords and terms used to perform the searches included “Viagra,” “Ciprofloxacin” (brand name Cipro®), and “Xanax for sale online.” This review of social media sites was a subset of NABP’s ongoing study of online drug sellers, which has found that 95% of websites selling prescription drugs online are doing so illegally.

NABP has been working with social media companies and other stakeholders to protect consumers from fake pharmacies. One example is Twitter’s and Snapchat’s requirement that advertisers of pharmacies and pharmacy products must be verified by NABP. In addition, NABP shared the results of the study with representatives from Pinterest, who said they are aware of the problem and are taking steps to further reduce the number of illicit Pins that slip through their filters. As Americans’ reliance on social media platforms for news and information has grown in recent years, it is expected that the prevalence of rogue online pharmacies in these spaces will also increase. The goal is for social media companies to take steps and use available resources to screen and monitor their platforms for harmful content linking to illegally operating websites.

Consumers who buy medicines from NABP-verified websites can be confident they are buying medicine from trustworthy, legitimate pharmacies. An easy way to know that a website has been verified by NABP is to look for the .pharmacy domain at the end of the web address. A list of safe online pharmacies and related resources can be found on the Find a Safe Site page of www.safe.pharmacy. Read the [full report](#) and learn more about social media sites and rogue online pharmacies by visiting the Program and Committee Reports page in the Publications and Reports section of www.nabp.pharmacy.

NABP is the independent, international, and impartial Association that assists its state member boards and jurisdictions for the purpose of protecting the public health.