

Online Pharmacies

Pet owners have multiple options when purchasing medications for their pets. These options include purchasing directly from the veterinarian (in-clinic veterinary pharmacy), purchasing from a free-standing veterinary pharmacy, or obtaining a prescription from the veterinarian to purchase product from local human pharmacies or online pharmacies. Pet owners should always purchase directly from the in-clinic veterinary pharmacy whenever possible. Veterinarians and their staff can provide expert guidance on dosage regimens, drug interactions, and potential adverse effects by taking into consideration the pet's history, current physical state, and behavior. Additionally, this approach is convenient and quick for the pet owner and helps to support the veterinary profession. Finally, the integrity of product handling (appropriate shipping and storage) has likely been maintained when purchasing from the veterinarian.

Pet owners should be aware of several risks associated with the purchase of veterinary medications online. These risks include the possibility of purchasing substandard, falsified, or unregistered/unlicensed veterinary products. The use of these products can lead to the absence of disease control, worsening of disease, adverse reactions, or even death. In addition, when a pet owner receives a product from an online pharmacy, it is unknown if proper handling techniques have been followed. This can include inappropriate storage, packaging, or shipping which can render the product ineffective. In other words, pet owners might have little control and knowledge of what they are buying and administering to their pets depending on the online pharmacy.

If the pet owner insists on purchasing their pet's medications online, certain guidelines should be followed.

- Pets should be seen a minimum of once a year so that a valid veterinary-client-patient relationship can be established and the veterinarian knows the condition of the pet prior to prescribing the correct medication(s) and to make sure no new medical conditions have developed.
- Pet owners should only purchase medications from pharmacies that are certified from the appropriate authorities in their respective countries to minimize the above-mentioned risks.
 - For example, in the United States purchases should be made from online pharmacies that carry the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites™ Seal (VIPPS), as these pharmacies have met state and federal guidelines.
 - In the European Union, a clickable logo is present on the websites of online medical retailers that are registered with their national regulatory authority. The logo contains the national flag and text of the country, not the flag of the European Union
- If the owner suspects that there are any problems with the medications for their pet, they should speak with their veterinarian and report to their local regulatory authorities.



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Resources:

AVMA <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/FAQs/Pages/Prescriptions-and-Pharmacies-Pet-Owner-FAQs.aspx>

FDA <https://www.fda.gov/media/75572/download>

EMA <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/falsified-medicines/buying-medicines-online>



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