

Charles Seifert, Pharm. D.

How can people make sure that they're purchasing medications from a legitimate source? 00:06

Usually licensed pharmacies in person is the way to go. And you can verify those licenses at the Texas State Board of Pharmacy to make sure you're, you know, you're just not walking in off the street into something that's not a pharmacy. And even those online pharmacies that are in the United States that are registered with the State Board of Pharmacy are on that website. However, you know, international things, Canadian Mexican pharmacies are not, they're not registered in the state of Texas.

What are some of the risks people face when buying online or internationally? 00:48

Well, you really aren't sure that the product is what you think it is. And so you know, there are a lot of legitimate pharmacies in Canada, for example. In Mexico, the pharmacies are really not registered with the Mexican government at all. So there's no way to double check the Mexican pharmacies, you essentially can walk in off the street and get anything you want in a Mexican pharmacy. And a lot of those products are good, but it's very hard to verify those. In Canada, they have very similar laws to the United States, and so they register pharmacies in Canada. But again, I'd be very leery of going to online pharmacies outside of the United States.

When purchasing from an unverified source, what could a person receive instead of what they intended to order? 01:38

Well, the DEA just sent out a bulletin talking about this one pill can kill campaign and what they're talking about is that a lot of the prescription painkillers like oxycodone, for example, the usually it's the drug cartels in Mexico are creating exactly the same look a like tablet, but it has other substances in it. And the big one is a very dangerous opioid called fentanyl. Fentanyl is used all the time in the hospital for doing procedures and everything else, it's very good drug if it's at the right dose. But the doses that are used in these pills are several fold higher. And so the equivalent dose of fentanyl to 10 milligrams of morphine, for example is about 100 micrograms. So these pills have two milligrams in them. That's 2000 micrograms, and very deadly and dangerous. Not only fentanyl, but other things like crystal meth also met amphetamine in some of these counterfeit products. So you kind of don't know what you're getting, you think you know what you're getting, but you don't.

So what are some of the procedures at licensed pharmacies to ensure you receive the correct medication? 03:01

There's an NDC number on every single product that is manufactured in the United States. And that NDC number is I think it's National Drug code, it will tell you exactly the manufacturer and exactly the lot number that it came from and the expiration date. And there are a lot of times where we have multiple different generic companies. So you might be on a drug for high blood pressure, for example, like I am, and you, you know, you've changed it's like, okay, the generic place that the pharmacy got it from is different. So, you know, it used to be like a peach pill. Now it's a yellow pill, like, oh, what happened, but it's actually the same active ingredient in that product. And there are good

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manufacturing practices in the United States that, you know, double check and triple check that. And so, most of the pharmacies in the US go through what we call a wholesaler. So that wholesaler actually contracts with the drug manufacturer for large quantities of drugs. And they have internal processes to maintain that what I would call it almost a chain of command or a chain of evidence as to where that was manufactured so they can trace it back. And then there's an element of trust from the pharmacies to the wholesaler. So there are two or three really good wholesalers in the United States that most pharmacies use. And then when it comes into the pharmacy, most of the time the pharmacist will never fill a prescription with two different products. They will, you know, either send this one back and just fill the prescription out of one product. So each prescription will only have one product and should have one lot number as well.

If a person is unsure about their medication, who should they talk to and what questions should they ask?

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Well, I think they can go and talk to their local pharmacist at any time and they can hopefully trace that back. However, if they've gotten something from one of these, you know, illegal sites, or not reputable sites, then they probably need to dispose of that. If they suspect that they have gotten something that's one of these counterfeit pills that the DEA is talking about, they should probably take that to their local law enforcement.

Is there a good source for verifying online pharmacies?

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The FDA has a website that has all of the registered US online pharmacies. And then they also have another area where they talk about what you look for in a bad online pharmacy, and particularly, say an international source. Because the pharmacy has to have, especially if it's prescription drugs has to have a prescription from a legitimate practitioner in the United States. And so if they don't require a prescription, that should be a big red flag that, oh, something's wrong.

Is there anything you recommend people to be especially mindful of when it comes to medication?

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I think being vigilant. Especially if you have, you know, older people who may be there, their eyesight isn't as good or their thinking isn't as clear, to always have somebody else review with them, you know, maybe organize their medications, that's a good idea. You know, if there is something that's changed, like in your case, you know, make sure you call the pharmacy and find out, Hey, did you know because pharmacies make mistakes, too. And so that's one of the best ways is to always look at that. If you just blindly take stuff, it can be serious. So these drugs are serious, you know, they can cause death.

Why is the DEA campaign, "One Pill Can Kill" so important?

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The DEA, you know, they confiscate drugs, routinely coming across the border. You know, if they've heard about our personal meth house, they'll confiscate all the drugs and they keep track of from year

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to year, what they've confiscated. So they have they have their own laboratory, they know exactly what it what it was. And so what they found is that these pills or counterfeit pills have escalated dramatically, they've gone up over 400% in the last year. So just I want to say that this was like from August or September of 2021. They've got more than they had in 2019 and 2020 combined. So it's gone up dramatically. So they're cautioning folks, and when they analyze most of these pills, they have this high concentration of fentanyl in it.

Why would drug suppliers put such lethal doses of fentanyl or other drugs in their products?

08:00

I think the public needs to realize that the number one drug abuse country in the world by far is the United States of America, not even close. Nobody else is even close. And so usually the Mexican cartels, they thrive on the US business. So your kinda like "why would they put such a high concentration in the pill?" and so the other thing a lot of people don't realize is that the way a lot of people abuse drugs is by crushing the tablets and snorting it. So with crystal meth, of course you smoke you essentially put the crystals into a pipe and light it on fire and boom that it volatilizes and you inhale it. And so inhaling the drug creates an intense high, very much more so than other routes of administration oral you can imagine it takes a long time to get in there and you don't get quite the high. So what they do with these pills is they crush them. Because they have so much fentanyl in there, they cut them down with other inert substances like lactose and other things, and then inhale it. But if you're unaware that it's in there, bang, you take it in, you're gone. It's bad.