

# Purchasing Pet Drugs Online: Buyer Beware

**“D**iscount pet drugs—no prescription required” may appeal to pet owners surfing the Web, but FDA experts say it can be risky to buy drugs online from sites that tout this message and others like it.



Some of the Internet sites that sell pet drugs represent legitimate, reputable pharmacies, says Martine Hartogensis, D.V.M., Promotion and Advertising Liaison for FDA’s Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM). But others are fronts for unscrupulous businesses operating against the law.

FDA has found companies that sell unapproved pet drugs and counterfeit pet products, make fraudulent claims, dispense prescription drugs without requiring a prescription, and sell expired drugs.

Pet owners who purchase drugs from these companies may think

they are saving money, says Hartogensis, but in reality, they may be short-changing their pet’s health and putting its life at risk.

CVM regulates the manufacture and distribution of animal drugs, while individual state pharmacy boards regulate the dispensing of prescription veterinary products.

### Red Flags

Some foreign Internet pharmacies advertise that veterinary prescription drugs are available to U.S. citizens without a prescription. But, says Hartogensis, “There is a risk of the drugs not being FDA-approved.”

### When ordering online

1. Order from a Web site that belongs to a VIPPS-accredited pharmacy.
2. Mail the prescription provided by your veterinarian to the pharmacy after your pet receives a physical examination.
3. Order from an outsourced prescription management service that your veterinarian uses.

*“A veterinarian should physically examine an animal prior to making a diagnosis to determine the appropriate therapy.”*

A foreign or domestic pharmacy may claim that one of its veterinarians on staff will “evaluate” the pet after looking over a form filled out by the pet owner, and then prescribe the drug. “A veterinarian should physically examine an animal prior to making a diagnosis to determine the appropriate therapy,” says Hartogensis.

CVM is especially concerned that pet owners are going online to buy two types of commonly used prescription veterinary drugs—nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and heartworm preventives.

“Both drugs can be dangerous if there is no professional involvement,” says Hartogensis. “It’s not a concern if the owner uses a legitimate online pharmacy and mails in a prescription from their veterinarian, who is monitoring the animal. But if there is no veterinarian–client–patient relationship, it’s a dangerous practice.”

**NSAIDs and Heartworm Preventives**

Veterinarians often prescribe NSAIDs to relieve pain in dogs. NSAIDs should not be purchased on the Internet without a veterinarian’s involvement because

- dogs should undergo blood testing and a thorough physical examination before starting NSAIDs
- dogs should be monitored by a veterinarian while they are taking NSAIDs
- veterinarians should discuss possible side effects of NSAIDs with the owner
- the prescription should be accompanied by a Client Information Sheet that explains important safety information to the owner

Heartworm disease is a potentially fatal condition transmitted by the bite of a mosquito that is carrying infected larvae of the heartworm parasite. Dogs, cats, and ferrets can get heartworm. Heartworm preventives, given daily or monthly depending on the product, kill the larvae before they become adult worms.

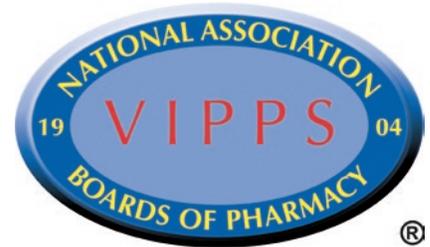
The American Heartworm Society recommends

- using heartworm medication for dogs year-round, no matter where you live in the United States
- getting dogs tested yearly to make sure they’re not infected with heartworm

“Testing is important even in dogs regularly treated with heartworm preventive products due to the occasional reports of product ineffectiveness,” says Hartogensis. An Internet pharmacy veterinarian cannot draw blood from the animal to perform the test. If the test isn’t done, a pet owner could be giving heartworm preventives to a dog that has heartworms, potentially leading to severe reactions.

**Tips for Buying Pet Drugs Online**

- Order from a Web site that belongs to a VIPPS-accredited pharmacy. VIPPS—the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites—is a voluntary certification program of the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP). NABP gives the VIPPS seal to online pharmacies that comply with stringent licensing and inspection requirements. Only pharmacies that sell human drugs are VIPPS-certified at this time, but sometimes veterinar-



ians will prescribe human drugs to pets when there is no animal drug approved for the pet’s illness. Check with NABP at [www.nabp.net](http://www.nabp.net) to find out if a pharmacy is VIPPS-accredited.

- Order from an outsourced prescription management service that your veterinarian uses.

These state-licensed Internet pharmacy services work directly with the veterinarian, require that a prescription be written by the veterinarian, and support the veterinarian-client-patient relationship. Ask your veterinary hospital if it uses an Internet pharmacy service. [FDA](#)

**For More Information**

Veterinary NSAIDs  
[www.fda.gov/cvm/nsaids.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cvm/nsaids.htm)

Buying Medicines and Medical Products Online  
[www.fda.gov/buyonline](http://www.fda.gov/buyonline)



# JOHNS CREEK VETERINARY CLINIC

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## Waiver of Responsibility & Liability for Prescription to be Filed by Internet Pharmacies or Catalog Vendors

Client's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Pet's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby request a prescription for medication(s) or vaccination(s) for my pet so that I can purchase these products from an internet pharmacy or catalog vendor. I have been informed that the following risks exist when I obtain these products from such sources.

1. There is the possibility that the prescription drugs received from these vendors may be counterfeit and may not have been approved by the FDA; the vaccines may not have been approved by the USDA; and the pesticides may not have been approved by the RPA. This has occurred in the past and could recur.
2. As the provider of your pet's care, our medical records keep track of all drugs dispensed by us to you. When you purchase your prescriptions elsewhere, our computer tracking system is not activated to print instructions for use or risks of adverse effects or to send email reminders for follow-up exams and/or lab tests that may be needed to monitor results or adverse reactions.
3. You may not have the prescription drug(s) available soon enough to start your pet's medications at the optimal time to provide relief for his/her condition.
4. When prescription products are purchased elsewhere, our staff members are unavailable to teach you how to administer them.
5. The number of tablets or capsules, milligram size of the unit, volume and/or concentration of liquid, and number of authorized refills may differ from that prescribed by the attending doctor.
6. Manufacturer rebates that would ordinarily be available for products purchased from this facility generally will not be available.
7. The manufacturer's warranties or guarantees for these products may not be valid. This means if your pet's condition is not effectively treated with the product(s), manufacturers may not stand behind their products or product liability procedures. Additionally, the owners of and doctors at this facility will be unable to assist you in claims against those manufacturers.
8. Vaccines that shipped through surface carriers and that arrive at your home unrefrigerated may be ineffective. Even if you reconstitute the vaccines you receive, you may be unable to administer them properly or may injure yourself or your pet when doing so.
9. Due to the fact the vaccines were not administered by a veterinarian, they may not be accepted as valid by kennels, airlines, licensing agencies or veterinary practices.

I have read and understand the above and the provided hand out from the FDA. I accept the risks, and am aware that this facility cannot accept any financial responsibility for paying for or reimbursing me for any treatments required as a result of the use of products purchased from these sources. In the absence of negligence, I agree to hold this veterinary practice harmless for any deleterious effects or lack of effectiveness of drugs or vaccines purchased from any other source.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Owner or Authorized Agent*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*