



**Royal  
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# News release

**For immediate release**

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## **MILLIONS RISK HEALTH BUYING DRUGS ONLINE**

Millions of Brits could be playing Russian Roulette with their health buying prescription-only medicines from rogue internet sites, according to research conducted by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB).

In response to this growing online danger, the RPSGB today rolls out the Internet Pharmacy Logo, a visual tool to help the public identify if a website is being operated by a bona fide pharmacy in Britain.

The research shows that over two million people across Britain now regularly purchase medicines via the web. While a number of legitimate pharmacies provide online pharmacy services, there are also a number of suppliers operating from websites offering to sell medicines who have no professional qualifications or healthcare expertise. In many cases, medicines purchased from such sites are counterfeit, substandard or unapproved new drugs, which put public safety at risk.

The research also reveals that almost a third of people admit to not having a clue about online regulations.

All pharmacies across Britain, including those offering internet services, must be registered with the RPSGB. The new logo will be visible on the homepage of participating online pharmacies and features the unique RPSGB membership number of the pharmacy operating

More follows.../

the site. A link from the logo to the RPSGB registration pages allows visitors to check the legitimacy of a website and the pharmacists running the practice before making a purchase. RPSGB Director of Practice and Quality Improvement, David Pruce, says:

“The internet presents a real danger to people’s health. Dishonest traders are selling medicines online without any relevant professional qualifications or healthcare expertise. The products they sell can be poor quality at best and dangerous at worst. People who wish to buy medicines over the net should do it at a legitimate registered online pharmacy. Pharmacists are experts in medicines and can lawfully and safely supply them over the internet.

“The public must be vigilant and we recommend that they use the presence of this logo in conjunction with a routine of checks when deciding whether or not it is safe to buy.”

For further information on the logo please visit: [www.internetpharmacylogo.org](http://www.internetpharmacylogo.org).

**Ends**

**For media enquiries please contact the  
Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain's Public Relations Unit  
020 7572 2653**

## **Notes to editors**

### **About the Internet Pharmacy Logo**

- The logo, a voluntary scheme, was trialled successfully following a pilot of 20 online pharmacies during 2007
- Only registered online pharmacies can use the Internet Pharmacy Logo
- The RPSGB advises members of the public to make other checks in addition to looking for the Internet Pharmacy Logo when buying medicines online. These include:
  - Checking the registration status of the pharmacist
  - Looking for the name and address of the pharmacy operating the website (it should be connected to a “bricks and mortar” pharmacy)

- Avoiding websites that offer to supply prescription-only medicines without a prescription
- Whether you are asked questions before purchasing your medicine (registered pharmacies are required to check that a medicine is suitable for a patient to use before selling it)

### **About the RPSGB**

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) is the professional and regulatory body for pharmacists in England, Scotland and Wales. It also regulates pharmacy technicians on a voluntary basis, which is expected to become statutory under anticipated legislation. The primary objectives of the Society are to lead, regulate, develop and represent the profession of pharmacy.

### **Statistics**

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,950 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken from 12 - 14 December 2007. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). 7% of internet users buy medicines online - YouGov.

In 2007, 31.8 million people had accessed the internet in the three months prior to 27 Aug 2007 ([www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfrdir/inta0807.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfrdir/inta0807.pdf)).

World Health Organisation estimates that 1% medicines available in the developed world are likely to be counterfeit. This rises to 10% globally, although in some developing countries they estimate that one third of medicines are counterfeit.

### Dummy of the new internet logo



### The most popular drugs obtained online

**PROZAC** - A pack of 30 tablets costs £20 online. More than 3.5 million people in Britain take antidepressants, with Prozac among the most widely prescribed of its type. There have also been reports of clubgoers "self-medicating" with Prozac to counter the come down from taking ecstasy. In 2003, 81 deaths were attributed to overdoses of these types of drugs and there have been reports of these causing some people to commit suicide.

**VIAGRA** - About £50 for four genuine tablets. Viagra nets more than £1bn a year for Pfizer and many more millions for the thousands of counterfeit copies that are available. While genuine, branded Viagra tablets will cost around £10, fakes are available for as little as £2 each. Doctors are concerned that it has also become a "clubbers' drug" with people mixing it with illegal substances such as ecstasy despite warnings that it can carry risks of heart problems.

**VALIUM** - About £50 for 30 tablets online. Recently, doctors have begun reporting a rise in the number of young women using the relaxant to sleep after taking cocaine or amphetamines. They are buying it online or obtaining it through the same dealers selling them illegal drugs. The Priory Hospital in Roehampton estimates that up to one in 10 patients at its addiction centre is now hooked on Valium.

**RITALIN** - About £20 for 60 tablets. It is used in the treatment of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It is an amphetamine-like stimulant which may decrease the appetite. Young girls and teenagers have been known to take it to keep slim.

**SEROSTIM** - About £6 for one injection. It is used to help build up the strength of Aids patients who suffer debilitating weight loss. Body builders are buying it online to bulk out muscle and it also enables them to recover faster from work-outs. Women are even injecting it in an effort to combat the effects of ageing and there have been reports of people in the film industry using it to make their skin look tighter and younger.

**PROVIGIL** - About £90 for 30 tablets online. Provigil is marketed as a treatment for narcolepsy, a condition that causes excessive sleepiness and can make it impossible for people to stay awake. Suggestions that it could also help boost weight loss and mood have made it even more popular. Clubbers are using it to keep partying through the night, while businessmen are buying it to help them through long days in the office, and students are taking it to keep revising.