Purchasing Pet Drugs OnLine: Buyer Beware

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FDA experts say it can be risky to buy drugs from online sites.

Some of the Internet sites that sell pet drugs represent legitimate, reputable pharmacies, says Martine Hartogensis, DVM, deputy director of the Office of Surveillance and Compliance in FDA’s Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM). But others are fronts for unscrupulous businesses operating against the law.

The FDA has found internet pharmacy companies that:
- sell unapproved pet drugs
- sell counterfeit pet products
- make fraudulent claims
- dispense prescription drugs without requiring a prescription
- sell expired, improperly handled or stored drugs.

Pet owners who purchase drugs from these companies may think they are saving money, says Dr. 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
- An internet 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 must physically examine an animal prior to making a diagnosis to determine the appropriate therapy,” says Dr. Hartogensis.
- Foreign Internet Pharmacies: Typically advertise that veterinary prescription drugs are available to U.S. citizens without a prescription. But, say Dr. Hartogensis, “There is a risk of the drugs not being FDA-approved.” Prescription drugs should not be purchased on the Internet without a veterinarian’s involvement.

Ordering on-line
- Order from a Website that belongs to a VIPPS (Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Site) – accredited pharmacy through the NABP (National Association of Boards of Pharmacy).

NABP gives the VIPPS seal to online pharmacies that comply with stringent licensing and inspection requirements. Check with NABP at www.nabp.net to find out if a pharmacy is VIPPS-accredited. Only pharmacies that sell human drugs are VIPPS-certified at this time, but sometimes veterinarians will prescribe human drugs to pets when there is no animal drug approved for the pet’s illness.

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