

Do You Know What's Hiding
on Your Marketplace?

A Guide to High-risk Products That Put Your Marketplace at Risk



Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
ABOUT LEGITSCRIPT	5

SECTION ONE

Psychoactives and Narcotics

Amanita muscaria	6
Ayahuasca	8
Bath Salts	9
Delta-8 THC	11
Herbal Incense	13
Ketamine	14
Kratom	16
Mescaline	17
Promethazine and Codeine	19
Psilocybin	20
Salvia	21
Suboxone	23
Unwashed Poppy Seeds	24

SECTION TWO

Pharmaceuticals and Unapproved Drugs

Apetamin	27
Etizolam	28
Fish Antibiotics	30
Kamagra	31
Melanotan II	33
Mifepristone	35

Nitrous Oxide	37
Nootropics	38
SARMs	40
Semaglutide	41
Tainted Royal Honey	43
Tianeptine	44
Unapproved Drugs	45

SECTION THREE

Other Problematic Products

Decorative Contact Lenses	47
Ear Candles	49
Fraudulent Flu Products	50
Ghost Guns	52
Miracle Mineral Solution	53
Modchips	55
Pill Presses	57
Pure Caffeine	59
Skin-lightening Products	60
Synthol	62
Vaping Products	63
Vitamin B17	65
CONCLUSION	67
Disclaimer	68

Introduction

You monitor seller listings on your e-commerce marketplace — but do you know what’s going on behind the screens? Illegal and brand-damaging activity isn’t always easy to spot, and the risk only compounds as your platform scales.

Sellers of violative products quickly learn that their listings will get flagged and removed if they operate too openly on a marketplace. As such, many adopt coded or descriptive language to help them communicate covertly with customers while avoiding detection. You need to know what to look for.

In this handbook, we explore common violative products and categories that LegitScript encounters in its work. We explain what they are, why they are problematic, and give you useful tips for spotting and removing these listings.



About LegitScript

Are you an e-commerce marketplace or social media platform wondering what products are sources of risk for your business?

LegitScript Marketplace Monitoring helps you quickly identify and remove problematic products across your platform to protect your customers and your brand reputation.

[High-risk and problematic products](#) are products that present a greater likelihood of being associated with illegal activity, consumer harm, regulatory enforcement, reputational damage, or card brand fines.

With more than 15 years of continuous data collection and e-commerce analysis, LegitScript has created the world's largest database of high-risk and problematic products spanning the payments ecosystem and commercial internet. We rely on our team of experienced regulatory and policy experts and skilled analysts to track industry and regulatory trends.

In this handbook, we provide examples of some of the high-risk and problematic products commonly encountered during our monitoring work.

SECTION ONE

Psychoactives and Narcotics

The term “psychoactive” is often loosely used to describe a variety of products and substances that have mind-altering effects. Narcotics, also known as opioids, comprise a variety of naturally occurring and synthetic substances that dull the senses and relieve pain. The poppy flower is the source for all natural opioids, such as heroin, whereas synthetic opioids are made in a lab and include fentanyl and methadone.

The majority of the substances we explore in this section are generally regulated under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA). However, not all are classified the same, and some are subject to fairly nuanced federal and state regulatory frameworks.

Amanita muscaria



What Is It?

Amanita muscaria, also known as fly agaric and fly amanita, is a fairly large psychoactive mushroom recognizable by its iconic red cap with wide spots. The primary psychoactive ingredients of *Amanita muscaria*, muscimol, ibotenic acid, and muscarine produce hallucinogenic effects when orally ingested.

Why Is It Problematic?

The unpredictable effects and potential toxicity of *Amanita muscaria* pose considerable health risks. Ingestion can lead to adverse reactions such as nausea, dizziness, and even seizures or coma in extreme cases. The risks are amplified by the variability in toxicity levels, which can be influenced by individual tolerance, preparation method, and the specific strain of the mushroom. *Amanita muscaria*, muscimol, ibotenic acid, and muscarine are largely unregulated globally. In the U.S. *Amanita muscaria* is unregulated at the federal level. However, it is illegal to produce, manufacture, distribute, or possess *Amanita muscaria* intended for human consumption at the state level under Louisiana law, and regulators in Florida state have recently begun citing businesses selling *Amanita muscaria* edibles based on the argument that *Amanita muscaria* is not an approved food additive. Internationally, a small number of countries regulate *Amanita muscaria*. For example, it is illegal to buy, sell, or possess *Amanita muscaria* under Dutch law and the marketing of *Amanita muscaria* is prohibited under Israeli law.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Amanita muscaria mushroom products are often sold for recreational consumption as “legal highs,” online as well as in smoke shops, headshops, or smartshops. They are sold either simply dried (e.g. similar to psilocybin mushrooms), or increasingly, in the form of gummies or other edibles.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

The colorful fungus is usually easy to spot on seller listings and, occasionally, it may be incorporated into other less obvious products like chocolate or gummies.

Ayahuasca



What Is It?

[Ayahuasca](#) is a natural psychoactive substance used in spiritual and religious ceremonies. Originating from the Amazon rainforest, traditionally this brew is a mixture of the [Banisteriopsis caapi](#) vine and [Psychotria viridis](#) plant leaves. Recent decades have seen greater awareness of ayahuasca across the Western world, including an exploration of potential medical benefits.

Why Is It Problematic?

Ayahuasca's potency can lead to problems due to its strong psychoactive influence. Possessing a powerful hallucinogen, [DMT \(dimethyltryptamine\)](#), it triggers intense visions and altered consciousness states. DMT is a Schedule I controlled substance in the United States (US), however, because ayahuasca is the central element of several Amazonian religious traditions there is a narrow use exception in the US for religious ceremonial purposes.

How and Where Is It Sold?

The primary consumption and sale of ayahuasca occurs in ceremonies led by expert facilitators or shamans. While historically this has taken place in countries where it's legal, such as Peru, Brazil, and Ecuador, the ceremonial use of ayahuasca has spread worldwide. The expansion

of its underground use, and the existence of markets and online platforms selling ayahuasca, poses safety and regulatory concerns.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Because laws vary by country, check where ayahuasca merchants and sellers are located and where they offer shipping. LegitScript has seen a rise in spiritual retreats in which substances such as ayahuasca are provided. Though many of these retreats are located in countries where such substances are not prohibited, these websites could still present reputational risks, and result in heightened regulatory scrutiny or card network fines.

Bath Salts



What Is It?

The term "[Bath salts](#)" is a colloquial term for a class of synthetic stimulant closely related chemically to [cathinones](#). Commonly, they take the form of a white or brown crystal-like powder and are often sold in small packages labeled as "not for human consumption" or "for research purposes only."

Why Are They Problematic?

Bath salts are highly dangerous due to their severe side effects, including heart attacks, insomnia, agitation, anxiety, hallucinations, seizures, paranoia, and aggression. Their use has resulted in multiple publicized incidents of violence leading to injuries or death. Additionally, these substances are often controlled substances.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Bath salts are sold both online and in drug paraphernalia stores, commonly under various pseudonyms such as “research chemicals,” “jewelry cleaner,” “plant food,” or “party powder.” They are typically sold in brightly colored packaging and labeled as not intended for human use.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Any websites or seller listings depicting bags of powder or crystals warrant scrutiny, especially ones that lack professional packaging and labeling. Be wary also of products labeled with “not for human consumption” and sold in bright packaging. Bath salts might be marketed as “research chemicals” in simpler bags. Additionally, knowing common brand names like Cloud Nine, Vanilla Sky, Ivory Wave, and others is critical in spotting bath salts in commerce.

Delta-8 THC



What Is It?

Delta-8 THC is a psychoactive cannabinoid produced naturally by the cannabis plant.

Why Is It Problematic?

Advocates for delta-8 THC argue that the sale of hemp-derived delta-8 THC became unregulated with the passage of the [2018 Farm Bill](#). Since this legislation did not explicitly mention delta-8 THC, merchants offering such products assert that this compound, when derived from hemp and containing less than 0.3% delta-9 THC, is also unregulated.

However, the DEA issued an [interim rule](#) implementing the provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill which stated that “all synthetically derived tetrahydrocannabinols remain Schedule I controlled substances.” This language is significant because delta-8 THC is only naturally found in trace amounts (i.e., less than 1%) in dried cannabis flower, regardless of whether the flower is marijuana or hemp. A product containing any substantial amount of delta-8 THC would almost certainly have to be produced synthetically through a relatively complicated extraction, isolation, conversion, and refinement process. In fact, it has been reported that some producers of delta-8 THC create it by mixing

CBD with battery acid, pool chemicals, or even household vinegar. For this reason, many argue that because delta-8 THC products are synthetically derived tetrahydrocannabinols, they remain controlled in the US under the CSA.

Many states currently ban hemp-derived delta-8 THC. State-level concerns largely center on preventing minors from accessing a psychotropic substance, the contents of which have likely not been verified by a lab. In fact, a [published report](#) found that more than 50% of delta-8 THC products marketed as “hemp-derived” contained impermissible levels of delta-9 THC. State regulatory approaches have varied between states with some banning synthetic cannabinoids from hemp products, while other states have redefined THC in their state’s controlled substance law to include any of its isomers, including delta-7, delta-8 and delta-10 THC. LegitScript believes this increase in state restrictions and the stated concerns related to minor access present significant risk of regulatory action in this area.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Delta-8 THC is commonly sold as a cannabis product in forms like edibles, vape cartridges, tinctures, and concentrates. Consumers can often purchase these through licensed cannabis dispensaries or online retailers, subject to local regulations. However, product quality varies, and because of the way delta-8 THC is processed, there may be potential contamination with heavy metals or residual solvents.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Since LegitScript began tracking and reporting on delta-8 THC in early 2020, we have uncovered sellers in our clients’ marketplaces offering delta-8 THC products. Although the vast majority of the merchants offering delta-8 THC are based in the US, we have also observed merchant accounts selling delta-8 across the globe. Typical delta-8 THC products closely resemble those offered by merchants selling other cannabis products, taking the form of cannabis flower, edibles such as food or dietary supplements, and as a distillate found in electronic vaporizer pens.

Herbal Incense



Image Credit: DEA

What Is It?

The term herbal incense is a colloquial term for smokable synthetic cannabinoids. To create herbal incense, drug manufacturers spray synthetic cannabinoids (such as [AB-FUBINACA](#) or [THJ-2201](#)) onto dried plant matter (usually [damiana leaf](#) or [mugwort](#)). Some herbal incenses are sold as liquids to be vaporized and inhaled in e-cigarettes and other devices. Herbal incense is usually available packaged in colorful foil packets, adorned with bright colors and cartoons.

Why Is It Problematic?

The use of herbal incense is associated with numerous health risks that range from extreme anxiety, paranoia, and hallucinations, to vomiting, violent behavior, and suicidal thoughts. Due to variations in the chemicals used and their potency in different batches, users are unable to predict the strength of their intake accurately. Additionally, herbal incense can also contain harmful substances such as [fentanyl](#) and [brodifacoum](#), which can pose severe health risks. Several synthetic cannabinoids used in herbal incense, including AB-FUBINACA, 5F-APINACA, and THJ-2201, are regulated as Schedule I controlled substances in the US.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Herbal incense is often available at brick and mortar retail locations such as head shops and gas stations. It is also frequently sold online by merchants and sellers who typically sell other psychoactive products. Sellers often market herbal incense products on social media, and may transact through secure messaging platforms.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Herbal incense is often marketed using slang. Look for descriptions such as “aromatic potpourri,” “herbal potpourri,” “herbal smoking blends,” “liquid aroma,” “synthetic marijuana,” and “liquid incense.” It’s also important to know common brand names such as K2, Spice, Scooby Snax, Diablo, Joker, and Wanted. Herbal incense is often sold in bright colored foil packages and may use copyrighted images.

Ketamine



What Is It?

[Ketamine](#) is a dissociative surgical anesthetic, with a dual reputation as a recreational party drug. Additionally, it’s increasingly used off-label to treat severe depression and suicidal tendencies because it targets the neurotransmitter [glutamine](#).

Why Is It Problematic?

Ketamine is regulated as a schedule III Controlled Substance in the US, and its recreational use and addictive properties make it prone to abuse. It often results in derealization, visual hallucinations, and euphoria. The sharp rise in the number of ketamine infusion clinics has sparked debates about increased access to the drug, addiction risks, subpar care, and inconsistent treatment protocols for ketamine.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Ketamine treatment is offered in a booming number of ketamine clinics across the country, chiefly administered by way of IV infusions or a nasal spray. The cost for such treatment varies significantly, with depression treatments ranging from \$250 to \$700 per infusion and pain management infusions costing from \$450 to \$1400. Online, illicitly sold ketamine appears on merchant websites that typically offer other recreational or designer drugs.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

As with any controlled substance, ketamine is subject to strict regulation. Ensure that any healthcare provider marketing ketamine treatment online is properly licensed and is abiding by the extensive regulatory framework regarding prescribing and telehealth. Websites or sellers offering ketamine for recreational use may offer other drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and DMT, though some of them may be scams. Sellers will sometimes post on social media and direct conversations to secure messaging platforms.

Kratom



What is It?

Kratom is a tree that grows in Southeast Asia whose leaves produce stimulant effects in low doses and sedative effects in high doses. It's sold online in the form of powders, tablets, capsules, and extracts. Kratom has been a hot topic in recent years because there's been a trend to market it as an opioid withdrawal aid.

Why Is Kratom Problematic?

Kratom is a controlled substance in many countries and is banned in several US states. In the US, Kratom has been the subject of multiple [Import Alerts](#) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [has stated](#) "kratom is not lawfully marketed in the U.S. as a drug product, a dietary supplement, or a food additive in conventional food. The FDA has also warned of serious side effects including seizures and liver damage, and has reported deaths associated with its use. As far as its potential for opioid withdrawal, the FDA suggests kratom offers not so much addiction treatment as an addiction alternative.

How and Where Is Kratom Sold?

Kratom can be purchased both online and in brick-and-mortar stores — often places like gas stations, vape shops, and cannabis stores. Online, it is often sold by itself on merchant websites and e-commerce marketplaces, though it is frequently paired with cannabis and CBD offerings as well.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Kratom merchants are typically easy to spot because they are blatant about their offerings. While kratom is now sold as soft gels, liquid, and gummies, it is still typically offered as a light colored powder. Look for the names of common strains such as red bali, white maeng da, and green malay.

Mescaline



What Is It?

Peyote is a type of cactus, small and spineless, that contains psychoactive alkaloids, most notably, mescaline. While this species of cacti varies greatly in size and shape, the crown has disc-shaped “buttons” that harvesters cut out, dry, and then typically chew or soak in water to produce an intoxicating liquid. Peyote extract is bitter, which is why users often prepare a tea by boiling the plant for several hours or grind the dry cactus into a powder that can be funneled inside a digestible capsule or smoked in a similar way to cannabis or tobacco.

Why Is It Problematic?

Peyote and mescaline are both Schedule I controlled substances under the CSA. However, similar to ayahuasca, they are exempt from control when used in a ceremonial context by certain religious groups under the [American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978](#).

The issue with mescaline lies in its potential for misuse and the unpredictable nature of its hallucinogenic effects. It can lead to intense sensory experiences, distortions in perception, and deep alterations in thoughts and emotions. This unpredictability can pose serious risks, particularly to those with pre-existing mental health conditions.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Mescaline can be found in the market in various forms, most commonly as dried peyote buttons or a powdery substance. It is usually sold by retailers specializing in natural psychoactive substances, both online and offline. However, it's worth noting that many countries, including the US, regulate the sale and possession of mescaline-containing cacti strictly.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Look for blatant marketing of mescaline or peyote on websites or seller listings, and become familiar with common nicknames such as buttons. Like ayahuasca, LegitScript has seen a rise in spiritual retreats in which mescaline is provided. Even if these retreats are located in countries and in contexts where such substances are not prohibited, these websites could still present reputational risks, and result in heightened regulatory scrutiny or card network fines.

Promethazine and Codeine



Image Credit: The Drug Users Bible

What Are They?

Promethazine and codeine or “[Purple Drank](#)” is a concoction predominantly made of codeine and promethazine cough syrup, mixed with soda, alcohol, or candy that has acquired fame as a recreational drug for its tranquilizing and euphoric impacts.

Why Are They Problematic?

The pairing of the two sedatives, codeine and promethazine, when consumed in quantities beyond what is typically prescribed results in impaired cognitive abilities and motor skills. Because of the sedative effect users run the risk of respiratory and cardiac arrest and the combination is especially dangerous when mixed with alcohol. As codeine is an opiate, users also run the risk of addiction. Codeine is regulated as a Schedule II Controlled Substance in the US. Promethazine is regulated as a prescription only medicine in the US.

How and Where Are They Sold?

“Purple Drank” itself is not retailed as a commercial item. Instead, individuals craft it using cough syrup containing codeine and promethazine. The constituents can be sourced either via prescriptions or illicit means and combined with Sprite or alcohol for consumption.

Tips On What to Watch Out For

Merchants or sellers marketing promethazine and codeine for recreational use are typically easy to spot. Their websites or listings look less professional, and they often include photos of the products paired with candy, soda, and/or alcohol.

Psilocybin



What Is It?

[Psilocybin](#) is a naturally occurring psychoactive substance found in certain types of mushrooms, often dubbed “magic mushrooms.” Used in cultural and religious ceremonies, it has a significant historical footprint.

Why Is It Problematic?

Despite its potential therapeutic applications, psilocybin is a Schedule I Controlled Substance in the US. However, some states, including Oregon, have approved its use for certain medical purposes. The regulatory nuance and the growing online interest in psilocybin and related products leads to increased potential risks.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Psilocybin and its related products are typically sold online. While the mushrooms themselves are Schedule I Controlled Substances at the federal level and generally illegal to sell in most local jurisdictions, the regulatory framework surrounding related products such as mushroom grow kits and mushroom spores can be quite complex. The regulation of such products can vary by jurisdiction and, even if unregulated, present significant risk and may breach certain terms and conditions.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Most merchants and sellers offering magic mushrooms are easy to spot. It's helpful to become acquainted with the names of common strains such as Golden Teacher, Penis Envy, and B+. Increasingly, sellers are creating products containing psilocybin, such as chocolate bars and gummies. These can be more difficult to spot, so it's important to read the product descriptions. If you encounter psilocybin-related products in your online marketplace, exercise caution. Be wary of sites marketing magic mushroom grow kits or other related products that may seek to circumvent legal regulations. Such products may not be regulated in your jurisdiction but they may still contravene certain terms and conditions and result in reputational damage.

Salvia



What Is It?

[Salvia divinorum](#) is an herb in the mint family found in southern Mexico. The main active ingredient in salvia, salvinorin A, changes the chemistry in the brain, causing hallucinations. The substance, often marketed online, has varying regulatory statuses across jurisdictions in the US. Both salvia and extracts of salvia containing salvinorin A are commonly marketed as “legal” psychoactive highs in states where they are unregulated.

Why Is It Problematic?

While salvia remains unscheduled at the federal level, several states, such as Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, Virginia, Tennessee, and Texas regulate its use. The DEA has listed salvia as a Drug of Concern, and it has no approved medical uses. Internationally, it is regulated in several countries including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Romania, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Salvia’s potent mind-altering effects make it a problematic substance. Users may experience extreme hallucinations, altered perceptions, and severe disorientation and loss of motor skills.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Online platforms are common marketplaces for salvia, offering a variety of products such as dried leaves, extracts, or tinctures. Specialty stores, such as head shops or gas stations, often carry it as well.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Salvia can often look like tea leaves or other natural products, so it’s important to be able to evaluate what is specifically being sold. Additionally, given the varying regulatory status of salvia, it is essential to be aware of trends in the jurisdictions in which the products are being sold.

Suboxone



What Is It?

[Suboxone](#) is used to treat opioid dependence. It contains [buprenorphine](#), which helps with withdrawal symptoms and cravings, and [naloxone](#), which deters misuse. It's part of a comprehensive treatment program that includes counseling and behavioral interventions. While Suboxone is primarily indicated and approved by regulatory authorities for the treatment of opioid dependence, there have been discussions and limited studies exploring its potential off-label use for other conditions, such as chronic pain management.

Why Is It Problematic?

Suboxone is a Schedule III controlled substance, which means it has a recognized medical use but also has the potential for abuse and dependence. Although beneficial in treating opioid dependence, suboxone can itself lead to addiction if used without professional oversight.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Suboxone is a prescribed medication, provided through a healthcare provider. However, it also appears for sale online, often by sellers who market it on social media. LegitScript has also seen an increase in med spas marketing ketamine online for use at their facilities.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

It is essential to ensure that any healthcare provider marketing suboxone treatment online is properly licensed and is abiding by state and federal laws regarding prescribing and telehealth. We commonly see websites or sellers offering suboxone for recreational use often posting on social media and directing conversations to secure messaging platforms in order to avoid detection.

Unwashed Poppy Seeds



What Are They?

[Poppy seeds](#) originate from the opium poppy plant, known scientifically as [Papaver somniferum](#). When sold for use in cooking and baking, poppy seeds are generally unproblematic from a regulatory and health standpoint. However, issues and risk arise either when the seeds are marketed with medicinal language, for example indicating they are intended for pain relief, as a sleep aid, as a relaxant/sedative, or for opiate withdrawal, or with marketing indicating the seeds are intended to be consumed to achieve a psychoactive high.

Why Are They Problematic?

Poppy seeds are typically unregulated for culinary use, being currently exempt from the definition of narcotic drugs under [U.S.C. § 802](#). The issue with poppy seeds lies in their potential to be contaminated with residual [opioids](#). Although the seeds themselves don't have substantial opioids, possible contamination with opium alkaloids such as morphine and codeine can arise. Some consumers have been buying unwashed poppy seeds to create a potentially dangerous home-brewed tea, a practice that has been connected to more than a dozen deaths. This is sometimes marketed as an opioid withdrawal aid.

How and Where Are They Sold?

Non-problematic poppy seeds are vastly accessible, and sold in local grocery stores, supermarkets, and online marketplaces. They are generally packaged in small quantities or sold in bulk, typically for culinary uses. Problematic unwashed poppy seeds are typically sold online accompanied by either medicinal claims or language indicating the seeds may be consumed to achieve a psychoactive high. What's important to look for is the marketing around the product to see if it is potentially problematic.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Listings that sell these seeds for mind-altering effects will usually refrain from clear marketing that would indicate that the products are being sold for such purposes. A common tactic is the inclusion of the disclaimer "not for human consumption." Another tactic is to include problematic testimonials on websites or related social media channels that indicate the product is meant to treat drug addiction.

SECTION TWO

Pharmaceuticals and Unapproved Drugs

Online drug sales are flourishing in the pharmacy market, which has surpassed \$1 trillion in annual sales. But many of these online sales are problematic, posing risks to consumers and the platforms that facilitate the sales of these products.

Unapproved drugs are ones that have not been approved for use in the jurisdictions where they are being sold or shipped. For example, a prescription drug manufactured in Mexico cannot be sold in or shipped to the US unless it has passed the proper regulatory scrutiny for quality, safety, and efficacy in the US.

In the US, the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDCA) enables the FDA to regulate new drugs marketed in the US to ensure they're "safe and effective prior to marketing and widespread use in the general population." A key requirement is that nearly all new drugs (with limited exceptions) obtain FDA approval. Drugs marketed without approval are considered unapproved drugs and violate the FDCA.

The FDA takes a risk-based, two-pronged approach to unapproved drugs by "giving enforcement priority to drugs that pose the highest risk to public health, without imposing undue burden on patients or unnecessarily disrupting the availability of drugs on the market." It considers unapproved drugs to "pose significant risks to patients because they have not been reviewed by FDA for safety, effectiveness or quality."

Even so, many sellers attempt to circumvent federal regulations and sell their unapproved drugs through unofficial channels. Others sell legitimate drugs for unapproved purposes. These are some of the most common.

Apetamin



What Is It?

[Apetamin](#) is a weight gain product that acts as an appetite stimulant. It's often utilized by individuals seeking rapid weight gain, typically women who are hoping to achieve a more curvaceous body. It is sold as a syrup and as tablets.

Why Is It Problematic?

The issue with Apetamin lies in its lack of FDA approval, which classifies it as an unapproved drug. It is manufactured overseas and illegally imported into the US.

Apetamin contains the antihistamine [cyproheptadine](#), a prescription only active pharmaceutical ingredient in the US known to induce drowsiness and increase appetite. Because it is an appetite stimulant, it has also been used to treat anorexia and severe malnutrition.

Some people use Apetamin for aesthetic reasons, in the hopes of achieving a curvy, more voluptuous body. However, using Apetamin in this way can trigger unhealthy weight gain and pose potential health risks. The FDA notes that antihistamine overdose may result in severe adverse effects such as disorientation and confusion, hallucinations, convulsions, decreased breath and heart rates, coma, and even death.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Apetamin is often sold in the US via the internet through individual websites and through social media platforms. It's typically promoted as a hassle-free solution for weight gain, luring individuals in search of a quick fix to achieve their ideal body weight.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Sellers of Apetamin typically market it as part of a wellness package or fitness program, often on social media profiles. They may drive customers from social media to their own websites or transact through secure messaging platforms.

Apetamin syrup is sold in a distinctive brown bottle with orange packaging. While merchants and sellers may avoid using the product name, keep an eye out for associated slang such as "slim thicc," "weight gain," and "AP." These are often accompanied by photos of curvaceous women.

Etizolam



What Is It?

[Etizolam](#) is a substance akin to [benzodiazepines](#). Sold in tablet or powder form, it was developed to treat anxiety, depression, and insomnia. Despite its status as an approved pharmaceutical product in some countries, it is not FDA-approved for medical application in the US and is regulated as a Schedule I Controlled Substance at the federal level.

Why Is It Problematic?

Etizolam presents significant risks to consumers and has garnered the attention of regulatory bodies. Although not approved for human consumption in the US, it is frequently misused for its potent sedative properties. This substance can lead to dependency, toxicity, and lethal overdose, particularly when combined with other depressants of the central nervous system.

How and Where Is It Sold?

The trade of Etizolam is predominantly online via a variety of vendors. A number of these vendors sell tablets manufactured abroad which are either shipped from outside the U.S. or enter the country through unofficial routes. Etizolam is known in foreign markets by names such as Etilaam, Etizest, Depas, Etizola, Sedekopan, and Pasaden.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Websites promoting etizolam frequently promote it as a “research chemical.” Sellers frequently promote it on social media and anonymous online forums, marketing it for research purposes only. This is rarely true.

Fish Antibiotics



What Is It?

[Fish antibiotics](#) are medications primarily intended for the treatment of diseases in ornamental, i.e. aquarium, fish that have recently been gaining popularity for human use as a low cost prescription alternative. Available in many varieties such as amoxicillin, penicillin, and tetracycline, these antibiotics are usually retailed in pet stores and online.

Why Is It Problematic?

At this time, there are currently no antibiotic products for aquarium fish that may be legally sold in the US (though there are some approved drugs for aquaculture use). Despite the perception that these products are "legal" if explicit human-use language is avoided, the FDA has regularly pursued manufacturers and marketers of these products, making clear that they are illegal, present safety risks to human and animal users, and undermine efforts to address antibiotic resistance. The agency has issued a number of warning letters over the past several years. Most recently, in December 2023, it targeted many of the most prominent manufacturers and distributors. The FDA has also published [warnings to the public](#) noting the concerns surrounding the human use of unapproved drugs intended for fish.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Fish antibiotics are predominantly sold in pet stores and over the internet. Vendors, both legitimate and illegitimate, market them as treatment for fish diseases, but they're frequently bought by individuals seeking cheaper medical treatment or ones who distrust the healthcare system. These substances often evade FDA surveillance due to their classification as "minor species" drugs.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Marketplaces should be cautious of any sellers offering fish medication with prescription-only ingredients. You can search the animal drug database on the FDA's website for approved animal medications.

When reviewing a website, look for marketing indicating that animal drugs are effective for human use. Read user reviews for indications that the product is being used for human consumption.

Kamagra



What Is It?

[Kamagra](#) is a sexual performance product sold as a pill or flavored jelly. Often manufactured in India, Kamagra typically contains the same active pharmaceutical ingredient as Viagra — [sildenafil citrate](#). For this reason, Kamagra is frequently marketed as generic Viagra, confusing many consumers into thinking that, like Viagra, it has been approved for use. In most countries it has not.

Why Is It Problematic?

The issue with Kamagra stems from its status as an unapproved drug in the US. The FDA has not approved Kamagra in any form, and in fact in 2017 issued an import ban on Kamagra pills. Without regulatory vetting, Kamagra may not be the same quality as other FDA-approved versions of sildenafil. Furthermore, if a drug is not approved, that means it is entering through unofficial channels, which may increase the likelihood that it could be counterfeit or adulterated. Kamagra's bright packaging and fruit flavors may give users the impression that it is safe to consume.

These medications can have potential side effects and interact with other medications or underlying health conditions. When purchasing from unauthorized sellers, consumers miss out on the important medical supervision and guidance that ensures the safe and appropriate use of these drugs.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Online sellers of Kamagra often target customers in the US and other Western countries who want to buy ED drugs without a prescription. It is typically marketed as a sexual performance product, though the seller may be unclear about what it contains. Sellers of these products frequently attempt to infiltrate e-commerce marketplaces, but also have their own websites or may market through social media.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Sellers of Kamagra may attempt to avoid scrutiny by using variations of the name (such as Kama and Kamag) or general keywords (such as "blue pill" or "male penis enhancer"). Keep an eye out for sellers offering satchels of gel, jelly, or other liquid claiming to enhance sexual performance. Also, monitor sellers who have a history of selling such products. They often update their listings with new titles, descriptions, and images.

Melanotan II



What Is It?

[Melanotan II](#) is a peptide or protein-based drug which acts as a synthetic version of a hormone called α -MSH, which regulates the skin cells responsible for producing pigment. When Melanotan II is injected or used as a nasal spray (its two common forms), it mimics α -MSH, and can cause dramatic skin darkening within days. This melanin-increasing function is its most notorious, but the drug has several other—potentially dangerous—effects, and has been reported to cause heart, blood, and eye disorders, among other conditions.

Melanotan's rapid skin-darkening effect has made it a desirable "shortcut" product for those hoping to achieve the golden, tanned skin that remains a popular symbol of beauty and health. In recent years, Melanotan II has made a particular splash online; a [2022 BBC article](#) calls attention to dozens of influencers promoting the nasal spray to millions of followers on TikTok. LegitScript has noted a correlated increase in sellers marketing nasal tanning products via social media, often with generic, self-branded packaging. Due to the high level of risk associated with Melanotan II, LegitScript is keeping a close watch on the trends and marketing strategies connected with it.

Why Is Melanotan II Problematic?

Melanotan II was initially developed and touted as a cancer preventative, but has since been the subject of bans, warning letters, and even criminal prosecution in multiple jurisdictions. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has not approved the drug for any indication, and regulatory agencies of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, among others, have also deemed it illegal to sell.

Users of the nasal spray form of the drug have reported side effects such as headaches, dizziness, panic attacks, nausea, vomiting, facial flushing, unusual moles, and more. It has also been linked to cases of melanoma. Aside from the dangers of Melanotan II alone, consumers risk exposure to any number of mystery ingredients. The BBC describes the findings of research chemists at Imperial College London who analyzed 10 tanning kits, “they would expect to find about 10 ingredients in a licensed medicine,” they write, “but were shocked to discover some of the products contained more than 100 unidentified ingredients.” In attempts to avoid detection and stay in business, sellers of nasal tanning spray often offer little-to-no information about their products’ contents.

How and Where Is Melanotan II Sold?

Despite its notable health risks, melanotan’s popularity has not waned. Its regulatory status has not halted demand either. TikTok and other social media companies have taken measures to mitigate the dangerous trend by removing videos promoting or selling Melanotan II and nasal tanning spray, as well as banning hashtags including #nasaltanningspray #melanotan and #melanotan2. However, many sellers have simply adjusted their marketing in order to avoid scrutiny.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

LegitScript analysts have increasingly seen sellers use social media to market Melanotan II, and use transaction laundering to process payments. Look for the following common characteristics that indicate a merchant’s tanning product may be repackaged Melanotan II:

- The products may appear in generic plastic containers without apparent safety seals.

- The products may display overly simplistic and unprofessional-looking labels. They may be self-branded with the merchant's logo, or display no label at all.
- The products typically lack an ingredients list, and often have a sparse product description.
- The marketing may describe application and purpose commonly associated with Melanotan II (e.g. "nasal" language, references to tanning "strengths").
- The marketing may include images of individuals with deeply tanned skin, stark tan lines, and before-and-after skin comparisons.
- The marketing may refer to the products as "MT2" or simply "2," common abbreviations for Melanotan II.
- The product packaging may mimic the form factors of those known to contain Melanotan II (e.g. small bottles with nasal spray caps).

Mifepristone



What Is It?

[Mifepristone](#) is the primary medication used for non-surgical abortions in the US, sold either as a generic drug, or by its brand name, Mifeprex. The most common protocol for medication abortions worldwide is to administer mifepristone in combination with another drug, misoprostol.

Why Is Mifepristone Problematic?

Mifepristone and misoprostol are prescription-only active pharmaceutical ingredients that are also subject to the FDA's Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategies (REMS) program, which imposes additional safety protocols for the dispensing of certain drugs that the FDA considers to pose elevated risk. In recent years, the FDA has lifted the in-person dispensing requirement; however, many states in the US restrict the prescribing of these drugs through telehealth laws or other medical practice requirements. That makes the dispensing of these drugs online complex.

How and Where Is Mifepristone Sold?

Certified providers and pharmacies are responsible for dispensing mifepristone, with telemedicine services also available in states where it is permissible by law. The FDA strongly advises against purchasing this drug online or from overseas vendors without thoroughly investigating the legitimacy of the dispensing pharmacy to prevent issues of authenticity and quality.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

When sourcing mifepristone, confirm that the provider or pharmacy abides by proper prescribing protocols and has certification under the mifepristone [Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategies \(REMS\) Program](#). As an additional measure, LegitScript suggests verifying if a pharmacy or telemedicine provider is LegitScript-certified to guarantee consumer safety and uphold compliance with health and safety regulations.

Nitrous Oxide



What Is It?

Nitrous oxide, popularly referred to as "[laughing gas](#)," "hippy crack," or "whippets," is a colorless, odorless gas often used as a recreational substance. This gas is typically inhaled via a balloon filled with a small canister gas dispenser, known as a "cracker."

Why Is It Problematic?

Despite its legitimate applications as a medical anesthetic and a propellant, nitrous oxide carries grave risk when used recreationally. Use of this substance may indeed produce euphoria, hallucinations, and laughter, but it also carries potential side effects including vomiting, paranoia, and even unconsciousness. Serious long-term issues such as vitamin B12 deficiency, nerve damage, and even death have been linked to nitrous oxide abuse.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Unlike some recreational drugs, nitrous oxide has many legitimate uses. It is a medical anesthetic and acts as a propellant in pressurized cans, such as whipped cream. It also serves as a preservative to keep food products from going rancid.

The sale of nitrous oxide for recreational purposes has unfurled across the digital landscape, appearing on a variety of websites and e-commerce platforms. It is often marketed under the guise of “laughing gas” and is frequently sold alongside related paraphernalia such as balloons and gas dispensers. Sellers often operate in, or ship to, locations where nitrous oxide regulations are in place.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Because of its widespread applications, it can be difficult to know whether a seller is offering nitrous oxide for legitimate or illegitimate purposes. Keep a vigilant eye for websites or platforms showcasing nitrous oxide under common aliases like “laughing gas.” Also, watch out for accessories such as balloons and crackers sold alongside the gas, which indicate recreational use. Stay informed about the regulations in your jurisdiction and/or jurisdictions within which you operate. Lastly, verify if the seller is operating within regions where nitrous oxide is regulated.

Nootropics



What Are They?

[Nootropics](#) are a broad range of substances marketed for their potential to enhance memory, cognition, and boost thinking, creativity, learning, alertness, and energy. This is a broad category of naturally occurring or synthetic compounds that can be prescription drugs, over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, or dietary supplements.

Why Are They Problematic?

Several commonly consumed substances are often considered nootropics, including caffeine, Ginkgo biloba, creatine, L-theanine, and Panax ginseng. These are generally not considered problematic.

Other nootropics have a greater potential for abuse. The off-label use of prescription nootropics or the use of unapproved substances to enhance cognition can lead to a higher risk of experiencing dangerous side effects. Examples of abused prescription drugs include the drugs to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), such as Adderall and Ritalin, and modafinil (Provigil), which is used to treat narcolepsy and other sleep disorders. In the US, Adderall and Ritalin are Schedule II controlled substances and Provigil is a Schedule IV controlled substance.

Additionally, some nootropic dietary supplements contain problematic ingredients, such as [phenibut](#) and [piracetam](#). Many synthetically derived nootropics have no FDA-approved use and are considered investigational new drugs in the US.

How and Where Are They Sold?

Problematic nootropics are widely available online on merchant websites and on some e-commerce marketplaces. Any vendor offering prescription drugs like Adderall without a prescription is problematic. These sellers may market through social media.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Take extra caution with any seller offering controlled substances like Adderall online for sale. Ensure providers are properly licensed in all jurisdictions within which they operate.

Problematic nootropic supplements can easily escape detection because there are so many potentially problematic ingredients; it's important to know which ingredients to watch out for. LegitScript has the world's largest database of supplements, drugs, and other healthcare products, enabling companies to check the status of these products and ingredients, and verify the legitimacy of rogue and certified websites. [Contact us](#) to learn more about our Database Lookups.

SARMs



What Are They?

[Selective androgen receptor modulators](#) (SARMs) are unregulated drugs marketed as safer substitutes for anabolic steroids. They are specifically designed to stimulate certain androgen receptors in the human body, enhancing athletic performance and promoting muscle growth.

Why Are They Problematic?

The issue with SARMs is their lack of approval from regulatory bodies such as the FDA. The safety, efficacy, and long-term effects of these substances remain largely unverified and unknown, respectively. Consumption may lead to health problems, including hormonal discrepancies, cardiovascular complications, liver damage, and other adverse side effects. Furthermore, these substances are entering the US through unofficial channels, which means they lack checks on quality and legitimacy.

How and Where Are They Sold?

SARMs are sold across the internet in various forms. Despite not being permissible ingredients, many sellers offer SARMs in capsules, tablets, and in liquid form often labeled as dietary supplements. These types of products are sold on sites selling sports and bodybuilding supplements.

Other sellers will offer SARMs as “research chemicals” in a variety of forms such as bulk powders and liquid vials labeled “not for human consumption” or “for research purposes only.” Though a small number of these products may actually be intended for research, the vast majority of them are not legitimate sellers of research chemicals.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Any website or seller offering SARMs is problematic. However, these products are also often marketed as dietary supplements, making them difficult to identify. If a seller is offering bodybuilding supplements, it's important to read labels to identify what the products actually contain. Look for common names such as [GW-501516](#) (aka Cardarine I), [SR-9009](#), and [MK-677](#) (aka Ibutamoren). Searching for a vendor's presence and activity on bodybuilding forums can often help shine a light on what their products contain.

Semaglutide



What Is It?

[Semaglutide](#) is a prescription only FDA-approved drug for weight management in obese or overweight adults with additional health problems. It also aids in controlling type 2 diabetes. By emulating the hormone GLP-1, it slows stomach emptying, curbs hunger and food cravings, and inhibits [glycogenolysis](#) and [gluconeogenesis](#). Semaglutide is generally administered daily or through weekly subcutaneous injections.

Why Is It Problematic?

The issue with semaglutide lies in its soaring popularity for weight loss, causing increased demand that exceeds supply. This has spurred deceitful e-commerce sellers to market semaglutide products without the need for a prescription leading to non-delivery scams, unapproved versions, potential counterfeits, and more. Semaglutide can have side effects if not properly supervised by a medical professional, and the prevalence of online scams related to it may result in consumers receiving a non-semaglutide product or none at all.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Due to its popularity and restricted supply, US customers may attempt to purchase problematic versions online from international pharmacies. These products are generally unapproved by the FDA and have not been vetted for safety and quality. Rogue internet pharmacies are increasingly marketing unapproved semaglutide-containing drugs without prescriptions. They are frequently advertised as research chemicals and marketed through social media channels.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Be wary of sellers offering semaglutide without prescriptions, and ensure that they're only offering brands that are FDA-approved. Red flags include vendors offering suspiciously cheap semaglutide or websites featuring products that lack professional labeling.

To see if a pharmacy is LegitScript-certified, search its domain name at <https://www.legitscript.com/certification/website-certification-status/>.

Tainted Royal Honey



What Is It?

[Tainted royal honey](#) products are often sold as a natural supplement or food product but contain undisclosed prescription-grade drugs or other achemical ingredients. These products have gained popularity in e-commerce marketplaces, often marketed as “100% Natural” or as containing ingredients like Royal Jelly, Ginseng, and Rainforest Herbs.

Why Is It Problematic?

The issue with tainted honey products arises from the hidden ingredients. Unscrupulous sellers have been exploiting limited government resources to sell these harmful products, which promise to enhance sexual performance but pose a threat to consumers’ health. They often contain ingredients such as [tadalafil](#) and [sildenafil](#) which both can have serious interactions with other drugs and pose significant health risks.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Tainted honey products are sold predominantly on e-commerce platforms. Despite the risk associated with these products, their popularity has surged, allowing sellers to rebrand and continue peddling these hazardous products.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

E-commerce marketplaces and social media companies must stay vigilant for tainted royal honey products claiming to enhance sexual performance. Reading product labels carefully and looking for any mention of prescription drug ingredients is a good first step. Any “100% Natural” product that promises enhanced sexual performance should be considered suspicious. Becoming familiar with the names of common problematic products by following the FDA and other regulatory agency’s alerts and consumer warnings and using LegitScript’s [Database Lookups](#) to identify products that have been identified as containing problematic or undisclosed ingredients will also help mitigate risk.

Tianeptine



What Is It?

[Tianeptine](#) is a potent antidepressant that is legally prescribed in several regions of Europe and Asia. However, it’s important to understand that this substance is not FDA-approved for usage within the US.

Why Is It Problematic?

Despite its intended antidepressant and [anxiolytic properties](#), tianeptine is a substance of concern due to its abuse as an opioid-mimicking substance. Misuse of tianeptine can simulate opioid toxicity and withdrawal leading to severe potential health risks.

How and Where Is It Sold?

While the sale of tianeptine is quite tightly controlled in most parts of the world, the substance finds its way into the US market primarily through online sources. Here, it is frequently marketed misleadingly as a dietary supplement or even an alternative to opioids. Moreover, it is also available in various convenience stores, especially in the southern parts of the US.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

To stay safe, it is advisable to exercise caution with sellers who claim to promote dietary supplements or novel solutions for opioid addiction that contain tianeptine. Always verify the certification status of healthcare, addiction treatment, or CBD websites, and don't hesitate to report dubious activity.

Unapproved Drugs



What Are They?

[Unapproved drugs](#) are essentially medicinal products that the FDA has not vetted for safety or effectiveness. We frequently see this in the context of drugs shipped from overseas markets from countries such as India, Turkey, and Thailand. While not all international drugs are problematic, drugs being sold in the US must have FDA approval, even if they contain the same active pharmaceutical ingredients as other drugs manufactured in the US.

Why Are They Problematic?

Even if international drugs have been approved by their home country, that is not a guarantee that they are safe and effective. Some countries may lack the same thorough vetting process or may lack the infrastructure to properly control the flow of pharmaceuticals. Furthermore, any drug entering the US through unofficial channels increases the chances that it could be counterfeit or adulterated.

How and Where Are They Sold?

The sale of unapproved drugs from international markets is a major problem online. While these products can appear on e-commerce marketplaces, they most frequently appear on dedicated rogue internet pharmacy websites, which number in the tens of thousands. These website operators often market on social media platforms.

Tips On What to Watch Out For

Be wary of websites or listings marketing international drugs. Labels in a language other than English may be a red flag. Sellers may also describe their drugs as “generic” versions of US brands. If you’re unsure, look up the product in the FDA’s Drug Approvals database.

SECTION THREE

Other Problematic Products

Every year, LegitScript flags millions of products for our partners. While many of these are obviously problematic, such as psychoactives and unapproved drugs, others are harder to spot: counterfeits, weapons, cosmetics, hazardous goods, and more. In this section we explore a variety of problematic products that can easily slip through filters, explain the regulatory or reputational risks they pose, and give tips on what to watch out for.

Decorative Contact Lenses



What Are They?

[Decorative contact lenses](#), alternatively known as theatrical or fashion lenses, are non-prescription eyewear that alter the appearance of the eyes. Popular during Halloween, Comic-Con, and cosplay events, these lenses do not correct vision but are designed to make a fashion statement. Despite not being used for vision correction, they are regulated by the FDA as prescription medical devices due to the health risks they can pose.

Why Are They Problematic?

In the US and many other jurisdictions, even non-corrective lenses require a prescription.

Regular-wear contact lenses — which includes virtually all decorative lenses — are designated prescription medical devices in the US because they pose a moderate risk to patient health when used without appropriate physician oversight. Improper use and maintenance of contact lenses can lead to severe eye problems such as corneal abrasion, allergic reaction, infection, decreased vision, and even blindness.

How and Where Are They Sold?

Many brands of decorative contact lenses are sold online, but not all have received FDA approval or clearance. Before medical devices (including contact lenses) can be sold in the US, the FDA reviews the marketing application or premarket notification from medical device companies to determine whether the companies can release the device into the marketplace.

While available year-round, marketing for decorative contact lenses spikes during Halloween. Many sellers market on social media.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

LegitScript considers sellers high risk if they ship to the US but do not appear to require a valid prescription for contact lenses. A seller may request a prescription be uploaded or emailed, but there may not appear to be a genuine effort on the seller's end to validate the

prescription. Although laws vary in other countries, e-commerce marketplaces should be wary of any listing, website, or seller marketing contact lenses without requiring a prescription, even if they don't appear to ship to the US. In some cases, sellers may still offer US shipping upon request.

Ear Candles



What Are They?

[Ear candling](#), also referred to as “coning,” is a practice believed to draw wax and other impurities out of the ear. Ear candles are hollow cones that have been soaked in beeswax or paraffin and hardened. During ear candling, a person will typically lie flat on one side while the cone is inserted into their ear. Once positioned, the top of the cone is set on fire, burning for a few minutes. Proponents believe that the heat from the cone will create a suction for wax and debris to be removed from the ear canal. In addition to wax removal, some ear candles have claimed to help with a laundry list of medical issues, including earaches, sinus pain, hearing loss, and even cancer.

Why Are They Problematic?

Regulatory bodies such as the FDA and Health Canada, categorize ear candles as unapproved and misbranded medical devices. These institutions have raised concerns about the lack of scientific evidence supporting the alleged medical benefits of ear candles.

Furthermore, the use of these products has led to multiple injuries. Risks include but are not limited to — accidental fires, burns to the face or ear canal, blockage of the ear canal by wax, damaged eardrums, and even temporary loss of hearing.

How and Where Are They Sold?

Despite the risks and warnings, ear candles maintain a strong presence in the market. They are sold online as well as in popular retail stores and health food stores. Additionally, they can be found in independent healthcare stores and even local healing centers. Certain massage offices also offer ear candling as a service to their clients.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Ear candles are distinctly designed and are therefore easy to spot. They are typically sold by sellers offering other health and wellness products. Pay particular attention to descriptions that claim the product can treat disease conditions; these types of claims increase the risk of regulatory scrutiny,

Fraudulent Flu Products



What Is It?

[Fraudulent flu products](#) are counterfeit or misbranded products falsely marketed as flu treatments. These products often claim to prevent or treat the flu, despite being ineffective and potentially harmful. LegitScript most frequently sees dietary supplements marketed with claims they can treat or cure viral infections, including the flu. However, some have also marketed certain foods and devices, such as air filters and light therapies, to treat flu conditions.

Why Is It Problematic?

The FDA has not generally evaluated dietary supplements, foods, or devices that claim to prevent, mitigate, treat, or cure the flu. The FDA has said it is “particularly concerned that fraudulent products might cause people to delay, forgo, or stop the medical treatment they need, leading to serious and life-threatening harm. The ingredients in fraudulent products could lead to unexpected side effects and interactions with other medications people may be taking.”

How and Where Is It Sold?

These products appear all over the commercial internet, including on e-commerce marketplaces, merchant websites, and social media. They are most likely to appear during the fall and winter, when the flu is at its peak.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

In the course of our monitoring work, LegitScript has identified websites marketing dietary supplements, vitamins, and herbs with claims they increase immunity and reduce the symptoms of upper respiratory illnesses like the flu.

To avoid these harmful products, exercise caution when assessing sellers that offer medications online. Check for proper accreditation, such as LegitScript certification, and beware of telltale signs of counterfeits like unusually low prices or substandard packaging. Additionally, be wary of products claiming to be a “miracle cure,” offering quick relief, or lacking detailed product information.

Ghost Guns



What Are They?

“[Ghost gun](#)” is a commonly used term for a privately made firearm (PMF) that is manufactured from a partially completed lower receiver or frame that has not been serialized. A lower receiver is the part of a firearm that provides housing for many of the internal components. With just a few extra parts and some drilling, these “80% receivers” become fully functional, resulting in an unserialized, relatively untraceable firearm that was obtained without a background check or a recorded transfer through a federal firearm licensee (FFL).

Why Are They Problematic?

While there have been legal challenges to the [U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives](#)’ attempt to regulate PMFs, at least [13 states](#) have already enacted their own legislation on ghost guns, typically requiring serialization prior to selling an 80% receiver or frame and a background check.

Even if sold legally, these firearms parts pose a significant reputational threat to e-commerce marketplaces, social media companies, and many others. Ghost guns frequently end up in the hands of individuals legally barred from owning firearms, and have been implicated in numerous high-profile shootings.

How and Where Are They Sold?

Mostly sold as build-it-yourself kits via online platforms, these kits include essential parts necessary to assemble a fully functional firearm. Instructional videos are often provided to guide the assembly process. The websites selling firearm kits often offer a wide range of firearm types, from popular models like AR-15 style rifles, glocks, and even AK-47s.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Sellers marketing firearm kits have become more difficult to detect and often separate the necessary parts across the catalog. Even so, it's helpful to be aware of the names of popular models and terms commonly associated with ghost guns such as "80% lowers," "frames," and "jigs."

Miracle Mineral Solution



What Is It?

[Miracle Mineral Solution](#) (MMS), also marketed as Master Mineral Solution, MMS, Chlorine Dioxide (CD) Protocol, and Water Purification Solution (WPS), is a product sold online as a medical treatment. It is an oral liquid solution that, when ingested as directed, produces an industrial bleach that can cause serious harm. Consumers mix a 28% sodium chlorite solution with an acid such as citrus juice. This mixture produces chlorine dioxide, a potent bleach used for stripping textiles and industrial water treatment. Proponents claim it can treat a variety of conditions, including autism, cancer, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, and flu.

Why Is It Problematic?

When the MMS solution is mixed, it develops into a dangerous bleach which has been linked to serious and potentially life-threatening side effects such as severe vomiting, severe diarrhea, life-threatening low blood pressure caused by dehydration and acute liver failure. There's no scientific evidence supporting the safety or effectiveness of MMS products, despite claims of it being antimicrobial, antiviral, and antibacterial. MMS has been the subject of warnings from numerous international regulatory agencies, including the FDA, Health Canada, Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration, the UK Food Standards Agency, the Agencia Española de Medicamentos y Productos Sanitarios (AEMPS) in Spain, the Icelandic Medicines Control Agency, and Argentina's Administración Nacional de Medicamentos, Alimentos y Tecnología Médica (ANMAT) all of which have concluded the product is dangerous when consumed as directed.

How and Where Is It Sold?

MMS is sold primarily online and promoted on social media platforms. Websites selling this product often describe it as a miraculous remedy for a host of serious illnesses. It's usually sold with a citric acid "activator," which, when mixed, turns the solution into chlorine dioxide, a powerful bleaching agent. Websites marketing this product often lean into wellness and, sometimes, even spirituality.

The most notorious distributor was the leader of Genesis II Church of Health and Healing, an entity created to avoid government regulation

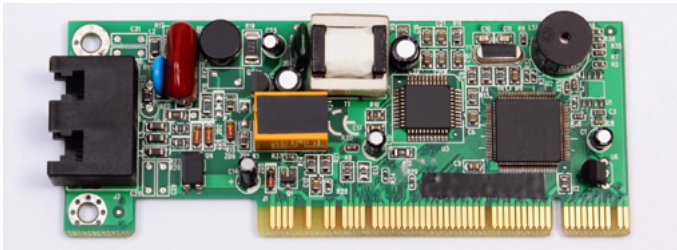
of MMS and shield the sellers from prosecution. The leader of Genesis, however, was found guilty in 2023 of conspiracy to defraud by distributing an unapproved and misbranded drug.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

MMS is typically sold in a two-bottle solution with unprofessional packaging. Look on labels or product descriptions for 28% sodium chlorite, or instructions that direct consumers to sodium chlorite solution with citric acid (such as lime or lemon juice).

Sellers of MMS often claim it can treat cancer, autism, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and flu and more. Any product claiming to treat a “kitchen sink” of ailments is almost certainly problematic.

Modchips



What Are They?

Modification chips (modchips) are electronic devices and components used to circumvent intentional restrictions on electronic equipment.

Modchips have grown in popularity over the last decade, specifically within the gaming community, and are commonly used to illicitly emulate popular games or to provide free access to games. These chips are installed by hacking into video game systems’ software and/or modifying the hardware with third-party components not approved by the manufacturer.

Why Are They Problematic?

Modchips are not uniformly illegal, which makes for complex enforcement efforts. They are, however, illegal for use in circumventing copyright protection. Protecting intellectual property is a key component of both BRAM and VIRP guidelines. [Mastercard](#) specifically prohibits the use of its brand for the sale of modchips, noting: "... modification chips that are primarily designed to circumvent protections afforded by technological measures for the benefit of the copyright holder violate the [U.S. Digital Millennium Copyright Act](#) (DMCA), and as such, are illegal."

How and Where Are They Sold?

Modchips are predominantly sold online across diverse platforms and websites. In addition to websites, it's common for modchip sellers to market their products in online forums dedicated to online gaming.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Video game consoles described as "fully loaded" or "jailbroken" that come preloaded with games are generally problematic. Look for sellers offering hardware modifications on gaming consoles, and become familiar with specific modchip vocabulary such as JTAG, RGH, keyvaults, and KV. It's a red flag if sellers offer odd disclaimers such as, "Not responsible if your console gets banned."

Pill Presses



Desktop Tablet Presses



Rotary Tablet Presses



Excipients



Hand Held Presses



Tablet Press Tooling



Pellet Presses

What Are They?

A pill press is a manufacturing device used to compact powdered or granular substances into cohesive tablets. In order to produce uniform tablets, a pill press must be fitted with a pill mold — a hollowed stamp that provides the desired size, shape, and imprinted design for each batch. The design and production capacity of these tableting machines varies widely, ranging from handheld presses to fully automatic rotary machines capable of producing hundreds of thousands of pharmaceutical grade tablets every hour.

Why Are They Problematic?

While pill presses have legitimate uses, illicit drug traffickers can use these machines to produce designer drugs, such as ecstasy and methamphetamine, as well as dangerous counterfeit medications with cheap and unregulated ingredients. These bootleg products and homemade highs are often manufactured domestically, frequently using raw goods shipped from abroad. Pill presses can enable individual drug dealers to create a business on their own without reliance on larger criminal organizations.

The sale of pill presses is regulated in the US requiring, amongst other things, that they electronically registered with the DEA. Some foreign and illegitimate suppliers will sometimes circumvent these regulations by shipping pill presses in parts to make them difficult to identify, or by deliberately mislabelling packages so as to obfuscate what is inside.

How and Where Are They Sold?

Pill presses can be purchased online from a variety of manufacturers, suppliers, and third-party platforms, each typically offering a range of machines and accessories for every budget and desired scale of production. Sellers will often supply video tutorials and instructions online as well, providing a user-friendly and seamless entry into mass pill manufacturing.

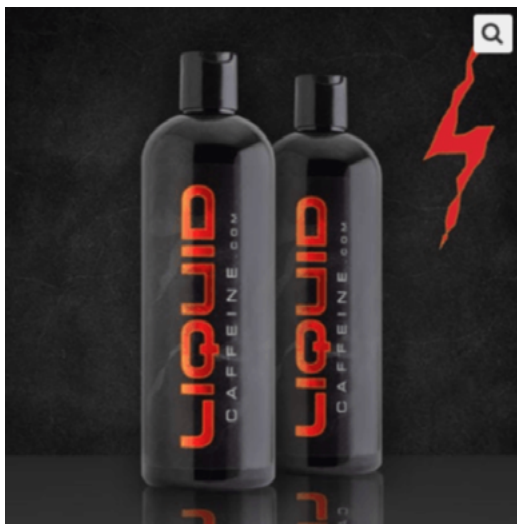
Counterfeit pill molds are illegal in the US, though many etched with common pharmaceutical branding remain readily available online on websites and e-commerce marketplaces.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

LegitScript considers the sale of pill presses and pill molds to be a high-risk activity given their potential for misuse. E-commerce marketplaces and social media companies should be on the lookout for pill presses sold with worldwide shipping, including to jurisdictions such as Canada and Australia, and any marketed as using discreet packaging. Presses marketed as being shipped in parts may also warrant further investigation.

Merchants accepting cryptocurrency for pill presses and related items should also be scrutinized, as well as those offering novelty molds and custom sets, particularly dyes of known trademarked images, symbols, or logos. These novelty molds, commonly marketed for "research purposes" only, are often used in the production of designer drugs such as MDMA and LSD. Counterfeit pill molds pose a high risk for intellectual property infringement, and can commonly be found for sale on social media pages.

Pure Caffeine



What Is It?

The popularity (and expense) of energy drinks and workout supplements has prompted many consumers to look for cheaper ways to consume their favorite beverages and pre-workout products. Exercise websites and DIY forums online are replete with recipes and instructional videos on how to make these products at home. Which may contribute to the growing interest in pure powdered caffeine and the relative ease of obtaining it online. Although caffeine is the most widely consumed psychoactive compound worldwide, pure or highly concentrated caffeine is potentially lethal. For this reason, it poses risk.

Why Is It Problematic?

Dietary supplements that consist of only or primarily pure or highly concentrated caffeine are considered to be adulterated under the FDCA because they present a significant or unreasonable risk of illness or injury under the conditions of use recommended or suggested in the labeling or, if no conditions for use are suggested or recommended, under ordinary conditions of use.

How and Where Is It Sold?

You can find pure or highly concentrated caffeine available on various online platforms. Vendors sell it directly to consumers as a powder or liquid, sometimes without providing clear dosing instructions. The FDA has sent warning letters to companies selling highly concentrated caffeine. One company's liquid product included a one-ounce measuring cup, which would contain 500 mg of caffeine when filled. According to the FDA, the toxic effects of caffeine begin at about 1.2 grams, and a life-threatening dose is typically estimated at between 10 and 14 grams.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Because of the risks involved with this ingredient, the FDA announced in April 2018 that dietary supplements containing pure or highly concentrated caffeine in powder or liquid forms are considered unlawful when sold in bulk quantities directly to consumers. E-commerce marketplaces may want to keep an eye out for vendors selling or advertising caffeine powder or liquid. It is sometimes marketed as a plain white powder; other times, it may be marketed to look more like an energy drink.

Even if a website selling concentrated caffeine states that the product is not for sale to the general public, the seller may warrant additional scrutiny.

Skin-lightening Products



What Are They?

[Skin-lightening products](#) come in various forms such as creams, soaps, lotions, and more. Primarily designed to lighten the skin, these products have gained worldwide popularity, though, some contain potentially dangerous ingredients.

Why Are They Problematic?

Despite being marketed as naturally derived, skin-lightening cosmetics often contain ingredients such as mercury, hydroquinone, and clobetasol propionate. These substances carry serious health risks such as skin discoloration, heightened susceptibility to infections, and even brain and kidney damage. Prolonged exposure to these ingredients can lead to severe conditions like depigmentation, hyperpigmentation, allergic contact dermatitis, Cushing's syndrome, and in some cases, even cancer.

The FDA generally prohibits mercury in drugs and cosmetics, and FDA approval is required for all hydroquinone products before they may be sold in the US.

How and Where Are They Sold?

Skin-lightening products are typically sold on e-commerce marketplaces and are often shipped or sourced from abroad. The products are typically targeted toward women and can be found where other cosmetics are sold.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Problematic skin-lightening products can be difficult to spot because they are often marketed as being all natural. Become familiar with the names of common problematic products, follow the FDA and other regulatory agency alerts and warnings and use LegitScript's [Database Lookups](#) to check for products that have been identified as containing problematic ingredients.

Synthol



What Is It?

[Synthol](#) is an injectable product used by bodybuilders to enhance the cosmetic appearance of muscles. The main components of this product are medium-chain [triglyceride oils](#), [lidocaine](#), and [benzyl alcohol](#). Synthol and other substances such as paraffin, sesame, and walnut oils are frequently purchased for use as dermal fillers to create artificial muscle mass.

Why Is It Problematic?

The use of synthol poses numerous health risks including deformed and unnaturally shaped muscles, infections, hardened patches of tissue, and nerve damage. It's also linked with more severe conditions like purpuras, cysts, artery blockage, extracellular cavities, fistulas, fibrosis, cerebral stroke, and even heart attacks.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Synthol and similar [site enhancement oils](#) (SEOs) are primarily sold online, often marketed as topical posing oils so they can pass under the radar of marketplaces and payment providers. They are sold on websites and marketplaces, but frequently marketed on bodybuilder forums.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Look for vendors offering “posing oil” and be wary of those who exclusively sell the product. Red flags can arise from product descriptions that mention “painless technology” or claim to use “pharmaceutical-grade ingredients.” Offers of discreet shipping and user comments discussing synthol injection should also raise concern.

Vaping Products



What Is It?

[Vaping](#) is the process of inhaling and exhaling vapor generated from electronic cigarettes or similar devices. An Electronic Nicotine Delivery System (ENDS) and/or a nicotine-infused liquid, along with other chemicals and flavorings, creates an aerosol that users inhale. This is different than smoking, wherein a user inhales the smoke of a combusting substance, such as dried tobacco leaf.

Why Is It Problematic?

Vaping is generally considered less harmful than smoking, but it still poses health risks and can be just as addictive. The FDA has called vaping a “potentially less harmful form of nicotine delivery” that may help adult smokers transition away from traditional cigarettes.

Vaping has become ubiquitous in recent years, particularly among teens and young adults, so much so that the FDA declared an

“epidemic of youth vaping.” Like any age-restricted products, online sales pose a high risk for violations. Additionally, tobacco is a highly regulated area. In a one-year period, the FDA issued more than 3,950 warning letters and more than 665 fines to brick-and-mortar and online retailers for illegal sales of e-cigarettes and other ENDS products.

Online sales of e-cigarettes and other vaping products experienced a monumental shift in the US when [The Preventing Online Sales of E-Cigarettes to Children Act](#) amended the [Prevent All Cigarette Trafficking \(PACT\) Act](#) by expanding the definition of ENDS products to [zero-nicotine e-liquids, as well as marijuana, cannabidiol \(CBD\), and hemp vaping pens and e-juices](#). As the PACT Act amendment prohibits shipping ENDS products directly to consumers through the United States Postal Service (USPS) and places other stringent restrictions on remote sales of these products, this legislation significantly impacts those selling online.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Vaping products are available both online and in brick-and-mortar stores. However, the online sale of e-cigarettes is often restricted due to the potential for sale to underage consumers and associated reputational risks. Some online sellers may resort to using transaction laundering, cryptocurrency, or other unconventional methods to circumvent these restrictions.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Any seller offering vaping products warrants scrutiny, but especially those marketing products that may appeal to youth, including flavored tobacco products and products with youth-oriented packaging such as bright colors or cartoon characters. These are usually easy to spot.

Less easy to spot may be certain ENDS devices. Vaping devices are often sophisticated pieces of technology that comprise many parts such as cartridges, batteries, atomizers, drip tips, tank systems, and more. Any component intended for use as part of such a system counts as part of it, even if it is sold separately. E-cigarettes come in many shapes and sizes, which can make them difficult to spot; some of them have been confused for pens or external flash drives.

Vitamin B17



What Is It?

[Vitamin B17](#), also known as [laetrile](#) or [amygdalin](#), is an artificially derived compound from certain plant substances including nuts, plants, and fruit seeds. Despite being termed as a vitamin, it lacks recognition from the [American Institute of Nutrition Vitamins](#), and as such it is taken orally or by injection and is used for a variety of reasons, including as an alternative cancer treatment. It is also sold in the form of bitter raw apricot seeds.

Why Is It Problematic?

The FDA has not approved Vitamin B17 as a treatment for cancer or any other medical condition, and has issued numerous warning letters regarding its sale. Consumption of B17 can catalyze cyanide production in the body, a highly poisonous chemical that can trigger severe side effects or even death.

Because Vitamin B17 is not regulated by the FDA, the product is entering the US through unofficial channels, increasing the chance that batches of it may vary in purity and contents.

How and Where Is It Sold?

Vitamin B17, or laetrile, is widely available online, particularly in e-commerce marketplaces. Because Vitamin B17 is derived from fruit seeds, online vendors often sell bitter raw apricot seeds instead of or in addition to extracted Vitamin B17. These seeds are also sold sometimes in health food stores. Consumers have experienced cyanide poisoning from bitter raw apricot seeds when they have unwittingly consumed more than the recommended two or three kernels per day.

Tips on What to Watch Out For

Because of the potential risk to consumers, it's important to watch out for Vitamin B17 in all of its forms. Read descriptions and labels for impermissible disease claims, in particular around the substance's ability to treat cancer. For sellers offering bitter raw apricot seeds, it's important that packaging include a warning about the poison danger.

Conclusion

It's often difficult to identify and evaluate the risk from problematic products on a seller's listing. To effectively do so requires sufficient information and context to make an accurate assessment. This means having knowledge of the specific products involved (including all specific product ingredients) being up to speed on all related legislative, regulatory, and enforcement trends, and having an awareness of relevant existing business affiliations and off-platform marketing.

LegitScript helps you quickly and accurately identify and evaluate problematic products by using big data, AI-powered intelligence, and expert human analysis. We help you maximize revenue while mitigating risk.

LegitScript's Database of High-risk and Problematic Products Is the Largest in the World — Spanning the Payments Ecosystem and the Commercial Internet

LegitScript [Marketplace Monitoring](#) combines the world's largest dynamic database of high-risk and problematic products, a team of global regulatory and policy experts, and multilingual analysts to quickly identify and remove brand-damaging products and mitigate risk. [Contact us](#) to protect your customers and your business.

Disclaimer

Not Legal Advice: The information provided in this handbook is for general guidance only, is not legal advice or legal opinions, is not to be used as a definitive statement of law or regulatory guidance, and are not intended to be a substitute for professional legal advice. You may not and should not rely on the information contained herein as legal advice for any specific situation and should consult with qualified legal counsel before making any legal decisions.

Not Health Advice: The information provided in this handbook is not intended to be, and should not be construed as, medical or health advice. You should not rely on the information contained herein for diagnosing or treating any health issues or for making any medication decisions. You are advised to consult with a qualified healthcare professional before making any health-related decisions or taking any actions based on the information provided in this handbook. LegitScript shall not be liable for any adverse outcomes or damages arising from the use of the information contained in this handbook for health-related purposes.

Third-Party Sources: The handbook may reference or link to third-party sources. LegitScript does not and cannot guarantee the accuracy or reliability of any information provided by these third-party sources and shall not be held responsible for any errors or omissions in such information.

Dynamic Environment: The legal and regulatory environment is dynamic and subject to change. The information contained in this handbook may become outdated or may not reflect the most current legal developments. You are always advised to consult with qualified legal counsel to ensure that any decisions or actions taken are based on the most current legal information.

Indemnification: By reading and using this handbook, you acknowledge and agree that the use of the information contained in this handbook is at your own risk and that LegitScript shall not be liable for any direct, indirect, incidental, consequential, or punitive damages arising from or in connection with the your use of this handbook. You agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless LegitScript LLC, its affiliates, officers, directors, employees, agents, parents, and subsidiaries from and against any and all claims, liabilities, judgments, damages, losses, costs, expenses, or fees (including reasonable attorneys' fees) that may arise as a result of, or in connection with, your use of the information contained in this handbook. This indemnification obligation will survive the termination or expiration of this handbook and your use of the information herein.