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# Safety concerns over e-pharma put Centre in a spot

The misuse of online pharmacies is a major concern against granting permission to platforms, says a parliamentary panel

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Central Health Ministry sources say that they are in no mood to give the e-pharma platforms a “free run”, calling the move far too dangerous.

“Consumer safety is our primary focus. Unlimited accessibility to medicines through e-pharmacy, sale of sub-standard, habit-forming medicines [like sedatives, mood-altering drugs], profiling of patients and buyers, and illegal data collection are the main concerns,” said the source, adding that this dynamic industry must be handled with care.

A cautious Health Ministry has maintained this despite a rap-on-its-knuckle by a parliamentary panel asking it to finalise the draft e-pharmacy rules and implement them without further delay. “Vigilance wins over the perceived convenience and economics of the e-pharma market.”

The parliamentary panel also expressed concern over the possible misuse of online pharmacies in the absence of regulation and mentioned that there are concerns over the distribution of illegal or unethical medicines, or outdated, substituted, or counterfeit medications.

According to a report – E-pharmacy Market in India 2022-2027 – compared to its physical counterparts, e-pharmacy has emerged in recent years as a superior and more practical strategy for addressing consumer problems and delivering excellent customer solutions.

“In 2021, the market for online pharmacies was worth ₹25.50 billion. It is anticipated to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 22.20% from 2022 to 2027 when it is expected to reach ₹89.47 billion,” it added.

While there are talks in the Health Ministry about a complete ban on e-pharmacy in the industry, earlier this year the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) sent show-cause notices to 20-odd e-pharmacies including Tata 1mg, NetMeds, Practo etc. stating that there was sale of drugs that weren't allowed for retail sale and lack of proper prescription. *The Hindu* contacted some of the e-pharma businesses, but no response was received.

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business doesn't help. "Stringent laws and strong e-pharmacy code of conduct will help this market," they say.

Indian Medical Association (IMA) in its white paper on online pharmacies said that drug abuse, misuse, self-medication, access to children, no place or system to evaluate adverse drug reactions, no clarity on drug storage conditions and no system of immediate recall in case of drugs are problems that the industry comes with. "These need to be addressed," it advised.



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