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Regulator places temporary ban on online drug sale

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New Delhi: People may have to wait a little longer before they can buy medicines online. The drug regulator has imposed a temporary ban on online sale of medicines even as the government is yet to take a final call on the issue.

Asking state drug inspectors to keep a "strict vigil on online sale of medicines", the central regulator said those selling medicines through the internet in violation of the law would face strong action, including a heavy penalty.

Many online platforms have come up which sell medicines, including prescription drugs. While most of these players operate on the aggregator model by networking with a local chemist who supplies the drug against prescriptions submitted online by consumers, there are serious concerns related to safety and efficacy of medicines supplied like this. Also, the regulator is concerned about the authenticity of prescriptions submitted online.

The drug regulator said in the past few months it has received several representations

The central drug regulator warned that those selling medicines online in violation of the law would face strong action, including a hefty penalty

highlighting "serious concerns" on issues impacting public health, some even endangering lives, rendering the pharmacovigilance machinery ineffective. The regulator also expressed concern that even if it finds out a problem in any particular online sale, it might not be possible to recall them. Storage conditions could also be compromised, it said.

In July, the Centre had formed a sub-committee to examine issues relating to the sale of drugs online and its impact on public health, following complaints against Snapdeal for allegedly violating the drug law. The panel is yet to submit its report. The health ministry is likely to base its final decision to allow or disallow online sale of prescription drugs based on the committee's recommendations.

Regulatory