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Health ministry declares draft rules for e- Pharmacies

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Online pharmacies will need to register with the government of India to sell medicines through the internet and will be bound a set of new draft rules that were notified by the health ministry recently.

The new draft rules require online pharmacies to be registered with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) and obtain a trade licence applicable across India from any state government.

As per the estimates, the total e-pharma industry is less than 0.5% of the retail pharmacy landscape currently, but is growing at more than 100% rate. The already existing Rs 3000 crore online pharmacy business will be streamlined.

“Any person who intends to conduct business of e-pharmacy shall apply for the grant of registration to the Central Licensing Authority through the online portal of the Central Government,” reads the notification.

The drugs sold online would need prescription and the pharmacy will have to maintain a detailed record. However, there should be strict confidentiality and no patient information should be leaked domestically or internationally. There should also be facility for customer support and grievance redressal.

The draft rules also ban the sale of narcotics, psychotropic drugs and tranquillizers.

“The work to regulate online pharmacies, or e-pharmacies, has been going on for the past two-three years. We had created a rough draft earlier and made it public for comments. In the final draft that has been Gazette notified, we have incorporated all relevant suggestions,” says Dr S Eswara Reddy, Drug Controller General of India (DCGI).

The ministry decided to make amendments to the Drugs and Cosmetic Rules, 1945, to include e-pharmacies as with the growing e-commerce in India, online pharmacies have also been becoming popular in India.

According to Reddy, The online store will be of great help for people who cannot access medical stores due to chronic conditions or for people who live in difficult-to-reach terrains where some medicine may not be available.