

Notice on Issuing the Compliance Guidelines for the Online Retail Sale of Prescription Drugs

China – NMPA General Office

Main information

Scope of Application:

All entities engaged in online retail of prescription drugs and those providing third-party platform services within China

Effective Date:

May 22nd, 2026

Related Provisions:

- Measures for the Supervision and Administration of Online Drug Sales
- Measures for the Supervision and Administration of Drug Distribution and Use Quality
- Good Supply Practices (GSP)

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Key Topics

Framework

- Categorized Compliance Requirements: respectively for Business Entities, Compliance Requirements for Business Activities, and Compliance Requirements for Third-Party Platform Management
- The Guide provides **formal definitions** for "prescription drug," "online retail of prescription drugs," "compliance," and "**online pharmaceutical services**," the latter referring to services provided by licensed pharmacists including prescription review, dispensing, medication guidance, and adverse reaction reporting.

What's new

- **Explicit Prohibition on AI Prescription Review:** The Guide explicitly requires that **prescription review shall be conducted by licensed pharmacists and cannot be performed by other personnel or by artificial intelligence.**
- **Ban on Promotional Sales Practices:** The Guide explicitly prohibits several common online retail practices, including: using short videos for marketing purposes, live-streaming promotions, private-domain sales that induce purchases inconsistent with treatment goals, and any form of prescription drug giveaways (e.g., "buy drugs get drugs free" or "buy products get drugs free").

Sensitive Factors

- **Information Display Restrictions:** Third-party platform homepages, health industry section front pages, and platform merchant storefronts may not display prescription drug packaging or labeling information. Additionally, before prescription approval, no drug labeling may be displayed.
- **Mandatory Prescription Validation and Adult Consent:** The Guide requires **real-name registration** for prescription drug purchases. Sales are permitted only with a valid prescription. For prescriptions involving minors, enterprises must inform that parental/guardian consent is required and provide safety warnings.

Drivers

- **Role of Pharmacists:** Online retailers must ensure that only licensed pharmacists perform prescription review and that pharmacist workload (daily prescription volume) is monitored and controlled within reasonable limits to maintain compliance
- **Marketing Strategy Overhaul to Avoid Prohibited Practices:** The prohibition on live-streaming, short video marketing, private-domain sales, and promotional giveaways for prescription drugs requires companies to completely reassess their customer acquisition and engagement strategies.
- **Implementation of Abuse Risk Detection Systems:** Platforms and retailers must deploy technical systems to detect and block abnormal purchasing patterns for abusable drugs. The "blocking mechanism" requirement for sales exceeding reasonable limits necessitates real-time monitoring capabilities