

20 Arrested in Crackdown on Internet Drugs

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Twenty people in the United States and abroad were arrested on charges they ran Internet pharmacies that illegally shipped narcotics, steroids and amphetamines to teenagers and other buyers around the world, federal authorities announced Wednesday.

The arrests were the result of a yearlong investigation by six federal agencies of online pharmacies that often operate in the shadows of the Internet, with no fixed address and no way to track where they are located, Drug Enforcement Administrator Karen Tandy said.

The drugs were shipped to buyers with little or no effort to verify ages or medical need, allowing teenagers or drug abusers easy access to addictive and dangerous drugs, officials said.

Tandy and officials from the FBI, Customs, the Internal Revenue Service, Food and Drug Administration and the Postal Service were to formally announce details of Operation Cyber Chase at a news conference Wednesday.

Among the organizations targeted was a Philadelphia-based Internet pharmacy that allegedly smuggled prescription painkillers, steroids and amphetamines into the United States from India, Germany, Hungary and elsewhere, repackaged them and sold them throughout the world, Tandy said.

U.S. arrests took place in Fort Lauderdale and Sarasota, Fla.; Abilene and Tyler, Texas; New York City and Rochester, N.Y.; Philadelphia; and Greenville, S.C. Authorities also made arrests in Australia, Costa Rica and India.

A study by the Government Accountability Office last year found it was easy to order drugs online. Some drugs received from foreign pharmacies were counterfeit and many came with no instructions or warnings, the GAO said. Others arrived in damaged or unconventional packaging.

The FDA has led the government's enforcement efforts against Internet pharmacies as part of its strenuous opposition to the legalization of imported prescription drugs.

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