



July 12, 2013

MADIGAN: POPULAR HEALTH WEBSITES MUST ENSURE PRIVACY OF USERS' HEALTH INFORMATION

Attorney General Calls on Top Health Websites to Provide Details on Consumer Privacy

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today called on several popular health-related website administrators to address the growing privacy concerns over the collection of consumers' health information online.

Madigan sent letters today to officials at WebMD.com, weightwatchers.com, drugs.com, menshealth.com, mayoclinic.com, about.com, health.com and mercola.com, requesting they disclose the extent to which their sites capture online users' health information, how the companies store the information, and whether outside companies are given access to this information.

"Maintaining privacy in a digital world is one of the most critical consumer protection challenges we now face," Madigan said. "While websites can offer important information, the use of the Internet to research health-related issues also raises troubling privacy concerns."

Madigan's letter was prompted by a growing concern that health information, which would be protected if disclosed in a traditional medical setting – such as a doctor's office -- can be captured, shared and sold when online users enter their information into a website. Yet, many times, a website disclosure about the extent to which information is captured or shared is buried in privacy policies not found on the websites' main pages.

Madigan cited a recent study by the Pew Research Center that shows 72 percent of adults in the United States have used the Internet to research health issues. As more people rely on the Internet for health-related information, Madigan said it is critical that they understand what happens to the information they share. To address these issues, the Attorney General has requested details of each company's privacy policy and information on how the companies gather, store and release private data to third parties.

A copy of Madigan's letter can be found [here](#).

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