

U.S. drug regulators go easy on efforts to curb Net drugs

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By Lolita Baldor

WASHINGTON -- U.S. government drug regulators are using a "lighter touch" in their efforts to stop a growing number of cities and states from importing prescription drugs from Canada, and the city of Boston is taking advantage of that new posture.

Acting Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Lester Crawford, in a recent interview with The Associated Press, said the agency would continue to evaluate programs on a case-by-case basis.

But he noted that many cities and states are using the same Canadian pharmacies and websites to fill prescriptions. Manitoba pharmacies are a major provider of Internet prescription drugs.

"As long as they're coming from Canada, and as long as they're from drugstores that we have some experience with, then we would have a lighter touch probably," he said. "But if it escalates and there are other countries, or if there are some events that occur, that could change over night."

Sensing an opening, the city of Boston is forging ahead with its pilot program allowing city workers and retirees to get cheaper drugs from Canada, despite a warning letter from the FDA.

Mark Reynolds, special assistant to Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, said yesterday that the city will continue to use Total Care Pharmacy of Calgary even though the FDA warned against it in an Aug. 4 letter. Issues brought up in the letter are no longer a problem, Reynolds said. He added Wisconsin has been using Total Care and is very happy with the program.

The FDA has consistently told city and state officials that importing drugs from Canada is illegal and unsafe. But the agency has done little to stop governments that set up programs, preferring to send warning letters and set up meetings to stress the risks involved.

-- *Associated Press*