

Google News hijacked by hackers selling fake Viagra

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Spammers have hijacked Google News to display advertisements for phoney Viagra as headline stories.

Experts said it was worrying that Google's systems could be so easily subverted to sell erectile dysfunction drugs after the company promised to crack down on fake stories and overhauled its news platform.

Hackers appear to have compromised the sites of smaller news sources including *The Santa Clara*, the student newspaper of Santa Clara University, California, and *The Filipino Express*, a newspaper for the Filipino American community. The hackers created pages on these sites that have been listed prominently on Google News in Britain.

The headlines, such as "Canada cheap viagra", which have appeared high in the health headlines section of Google News, are clearly not for legitimate stories and click through to order

forms for bulk quantities of pills. Google was made aware of the issue when *Search Engine Land*, a specialist website, reported the appearance of large numbers of pharmacy advertisements on the platform two months ago. Nevertheless, the advertisements have continued to appear since then.

Unregulated pharmacy sites may be used for outright scams and to "phish" for people's bank details.

Experts have questioned how Google's algorithms could enable spammers to game the system, warning that people intending to spread misinformation could use the same tactics.

A Google spokesman said: "The team is looking into the problem but can confirm that Google News was not hacked."

Dr Zhewei Zhang, a technology expert at Warwick Business School, said small local news websites that don't have IT security professionals were "extremely vulnerable" but that Google "should take more responsibility".

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