



## Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

MHRA Central Freedom of  
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[MHRA Website](https://www.mhra.gov.uk)

Our Ref: **FOI2025/00154**

28 February 2025

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 19 February. You wrote:

*I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act regarding illegal prescription drug sales in the UK. Specifically, I would like to know:*

*How many reports of illegal prescription drug sales have been received in the past five years?*

*What types of prescription drugs are most commonly reported as being sold illegally?  
Can you provide data on enforcement actions taken against individuals or groups selling prescription medications without authorisation?*

*Are there any specific trends noted in the methods used to sell these drugs, such as social media platforms?*

*Thank you for your assistance with this request. I look forward to your response.*

### **MHRA Response**

We are unable to deal with your Fol request without clarification of the information you seek. It will assist us to answer your request if you could advise us if you interested in a particular medicine used to treat a specific problem, or if you are interested in all medicine falling under a particular classification? We do hold some information that may answer the questions asked, however this is held over several systems and will require a high degree of manual processing. It will assist in answering your requests if you will focus your enquiry to a period of less than 5 years.

Under Section 16 of the Fol Act we should assist you in helping you focus your request.

In the UK, medicines require a Marketing Authorisation (MA) to be legally sold or supplied to patients. An MA signifies that the product has met the appropriate standards for safety, quality and efficacy. Authorised medicines may be classified as Prescription Only, Pharmacy Only, General Sales List (GSL), or Non GSL. Some medicines may also be classified as controlled drugs.

If a medicine does not hold an MA, then it is classified as an unauthorised medicine.

We are seeking to ensure that we provide you with the information that best fits your purpose for requesting this information. We do receive a small number of reports about prescription only medicines being illegally sold or supplied, but enquiries often show that the issue is instead the sale or supply of unauthorised medicines. For example, we may receive a referral that states that an aesthetics practitioner is offering 'Botox' without the oversight of a suitable healthcare professional. Most of these reports will not involve 'Botox', which is a medicine brand that holds an MA, but instead concern the sale/supply of an unauthorised medicine that contains botulinum toxin. There are relatively small numbers of cases that concern the sale or supply of a prescription only medicine without a valid prescription (i.e. are a breach of regulations 214 and 255 of the Human Medicines Regulations 2012).

Similarly, there are very few illegal prescription drug sales recorded annually. Medicines obtained outside the legal supply chain are either unauthorised or falsified medicines. We are aware that some prescription medicines are offered for sale via social media, however this is often opportunistic activity by individuals rather than an organised trade.

We will consider any revised request however we cannot guarantee that any revised request will fall within the cost limit.

We recommend that you familiarise yourself with the Information Commissioners Office guidance on how to submit an FOI to a public authority. We have provided these links below to aid in future requests:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/official-information/preparing-and-submitting-your-information-request/>

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

MHRA Central Freedom of Information Team  
Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

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## **Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act**

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing [foi.request@mhra.gov.uk](mailto:foi.request@mhra.gov.uk) or by writing to: MHRA Central Freedom of Information Team, 10 South, Colonnade, Canary Wharf, London, E14 4PU

Any request for an internal review must be received by us within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please note we are not obliged to provide a review if it is requested after more than 40 working days.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Website: [ICO FOI and EIR complaints](https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/official-information/preparing-and-submitting-your-information-request/) or telephone 0303 123 1113.

## **Re-use of our information**

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<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>