HPRA reports continued detentions of substances for likely cosmetic and body image purposes including anabolic steroids and semaglutide products

The HPRA today reported a sharp increase in the volume of illegal medicines detained in the first half of 2024 compared to the same period last year. The HPRA's enforcement section detained 706,881 dosage units of falsified and illegal medicines between January and June 2024, compared to 551,582 units for the same period last year. Announcing its detention figures, the HPRA cautioned the public of the serious health risks posed by prescription medicines being purchased online from unauthorised sources. It states that there is no guarantee as to the safety or quality of illegal prescription medicines purchased outside of the regulated pharmacy setting.

In the first six months of 2024, the most significant categories of illegal products detained included anabolic steroids (23%), analgesics (14%), sedatives (11%) and erectile dysfunction medicines (10%). The breakdown is as follows:

* Anabolic Steroids - 160,134 units detained;
* Analgesic medicines - 96,481 units detained;
* Sedative medicines - 80,773 units detained;
* Erectile dysfunction medicines - 72,555 units detained.

As part of its enforcement measures, the HPRA continues to monitor online activity promoting prescription medicines and other substances, and routinely intervenes to disrupt this promotion. In the first six months of this year, the key enforcement actions taken included:

* 1,603 e-commerce listings and/or social media pages amended or shutdown;
* One prosecution initiated and four voluntary formal cautions issued.

Grainne Power, Director of Compliance at the HPRA, noted the significant increase in 2024 data and the apparent willingness of many people to seek access to unregulated products which may pose significant risks to their health. She emphasized the type of units detained also give an insight into a growing tendency among some consumers to jeopardize their health for aesthetic, cosmetic and body image purposes by seeking out illegal or unapproved substances.

"It's alarming to see consumers willing to take risks by purchasing illegal medicines online and from unregulated sources and this includes products for cosmetic and body image purposes. One such example is the amount of illegal anabolic steroids detained. We believe young men, in particular, may be sourcing anabolic steroids for body enhancement while being unaware of the serious health complications posed by these products. Anabolic steroids can cause serious physical and psychological health issues. The potential physical side effects alone include heart failure, liver issues, kidney damage, and infertility."

"Additionally, a notable rise is evident in detentions of semaglutide\*, a prescription medication intended for specific medical purposes such as diabetes or weight management under certain conditions. While overall the numbers detained are small in comparison to other products, we have already in the first six months of 2024 detained almost triple the volume of illegal units of semaglutide detained last year."

In conclusion, Ms Power stated that "when consumers acquire any medicinal substances outside the regulated supply chain, they forego any assurance of safety, quality, or effectiveness. Some of these substances might not be authorised by any global health authority, while others may be counterfeit or falsified despite appearing legitimate. It's crucial not to compromise your health by taking such risks. We strongly advise anyone who has bought prescription medicines from unauthorised sources to cease using them immediately and to consult a healthcare professional with any concerns about their well-being."

Other products of note detained by the HPRA:

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| **Units Detained** |
| Year | Botulinum toxin | Melanotan 2 | Semaglutide | Liraglutide |
| 2020 | 26 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 394 | 790 | 0 | 8 |
| 2022 | 339 | 950 | 32 | 8 |
| 2023 | 1,748 | 1,329 | 286 | 253 |
| 2024 (6 months) | 872 | 708 | 783 | 66 |

The HPRA works in close co-operation with colleagues from An Garda Síochána and Revenue's Customs Service with whom there is significant inter-agency collaboration to combat the illegal supply of health products into and within Ireland. It also co-operates and shares intelligence with other regulatory and law enforcement agencies worldwide to prevent the illegal manufacture, importation and distribution of medicines, medical devices, and cosmetics.

The HPRA is responsible for prosecuting cases where it considers that there is a significant risk to public health or where there are persistent non-compliances. The HPRA also supports prosecutions brought by the Director of Public Prosecutions in relation to the illegal supply of medicines.

* [Know the dangers of buying prescription medicine online](https://online-medicine-safety.hpra.ie/): The HPRA’s digital information campaign with help and advice for members of the public.
* For more information on the specific dangers of anabolic steroid use, please visit [www.zerogains.ie](http://www.zerogains.ie/).
* The HPRA welcomes reports of suspicious activities linked to the supply of medicines and other health products. Anyone can report in confidence to the HPRA at reportacase@hpra.ie or at 01 634 3871.

(\*OzempicTM, RybelsusTM and WegovyTM)