

Ref: H202000245

Dear [REDACTED]

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request for information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 17 January 2020:

"This is an Official Information Act request about imported medications referred to Medsafe. I would like to know:

- 1. The number of intercepted packages referred to Medsafe in the following years: 2009, 2010, and 2017, 2018, 2019 and so far in 2020*
- 2. The number of packages kept for further investigation in the following years: 2009, 2010, and 2017, 2018, 2019 and so far in 2020*
- 3. A breakdown by the type of medication (eg erectile dysfunction, insomnia, pain....) for 2009 and 2019*
- 4. A breakdown by which region in New Zealand the medication was destined for, for 2009 and 2019*
- 5. How many referred packages were destroyed and for how many was there a valid prescription?*
- 6. The most common countries of origin for imported medication in 2018 and 2019.*
- 7. The most common reasons people give for importing medications.*
- 8. Any emerging trends/concerns noted by Pharmac."*

The Ministry collects information regarding packages referred to Medsafe by New Zealand Customs (Customs) on a calendar year basis. The figures for 2019 will not be finalised until the end of March 2020 and the figures for 2020 will not be finalised until the end of March 2021. Due to this, the information that follows does not include the figures for 2019 and 2020.

All prescription medicine arriving by international mail passes through the International Mail Centre (IMC) in Auckland. Prescription medicine may also be imported by arriving passengers at airports and from inspections of cargo at the Auckland Air Cargo Inspection Facility (ACIF). The Ministry holds information for arriving passengers and the ACIF for 2018 only, as information prior to this is not readily available.

My answers to your questions are as follows.

- 1. The number of intercepted packages referred to Medsafe in the following years: 2009, 2010, and 2017, 2018, 2019 and so far in 2020.*

Table one sets out the number of parcels and medicines referred to Medsafe by Customs at the IMC in 2009, 2010, 2017 and 2018, where Customs believed on reasonable grounds that the parcel contained a prescription medicine.

TABLE ONE: PARCELS REFERRED TO MEDSAFE BY CUSTOMS (IMC)		
Year	Number of Parcels	Number of Medicines
2009	14,561	20,182
2010	11,930	15,996
2017	10,849	15,802
2018	10,598	16,858

Some of these parcels may not have contained prescription medicines. They may have been released at the time of inspection because the medicines were:

- Supplements
- Ayurvedic
- Homeopathic
- Scheduled as general sale
- Pharmacy or pharmacist only
- Medicines authorised by a New Zealand authorised prescriber
- Medicines destined to a person or company licenced under the Medicines Act 1981 to import the medicine.

In 2018:

- 173 consignments were referred to Medsafe by Customs at the ACIF. 29 medicines were subsequently released.
 - 1,198 medicines were referred to Customs by Medsafe from 540 passengers arriving at Airports. 311 medicines were subsequently released.
2. *The number of packages kept for further investigation in the following years: 2009, 2010, and 2017, 2018, 2019 and so far in 2020.*

Table two sets out the number of medicines detained by Medsafe at the IMC in 2009, 2010, 2017 and 2018. These numbers relate to the total number of medicines, not the number of parcels, as one parcel may contain several medicines.

TABLE TWO: NUMBER OF MEDICINES DETAINED (IMC)	
Year	Number of Medicines Detained
2009	12,024
2010	9,441
2017	12,232
2018	13,897

Of the 173 consignments were referred to Medsafe by Customs at the ACIF in 2018, 138 medicines were detained.

3. *A breakdown by the type of medication (eg erectile dysfunction, insomnia, pain....) for 2009 and 2019.*

Table three sets out the total number of medicines by category referred to Medsafe by Customs at the IMC. Medicines are categorised into groups based on its indicated use. As the information for 2019 is not available, I have provided the totals for 2009 and 2018.

TABLE THREE: NUMBER OF MEDICINES REFERRED BY CATEGORY (IMC)		
Category	2009	2018
Antibiotic	2,794	1,588
Baldness	179	132
Birth Control	246	93
Controlled Drug	421	383
Cites*	24	2
Diabetes	367	283
Endocrine	675	689
Erectile Dysfunction	2,641	5,738
Flu (cough/cold)	140	14
Foreign Medicine	820	13
Gastrointestinal	558	441
Heart Disease	1175	739
Insomnia	289	965
Lower Respiratory/Asthma	214	292
Mental Health	554	369
Nootropic	0	340
Other	469	1,184
Pain relief	884	807
Skin	217	284
Suspected Medicine	73	14
Unlabelled	1,023	435
Weight Loss	700	54
Released (no category)**	5,719	1,995
Total Medicines	20,182	16,854
<p>* Cites are medicines that contain material derived from endangered species (plant and/or animal products).</p> <p>** 2018 does not include 59 medicines (mostly unscheduled high risk) that were released but are included in relevant category.</p> <p>In 2018, four medicines were referred to the Ministry for Primary Industries that were not categorised.</p>		

Table four sets out the total number of medicines by category referred to Medsafe by Customs at the ACIF in 2018. Medicines are categorised into groups based on its indicated use.

TABLE FOUR: NUMBER OF MEDICINES REFERRED BY CATEGORY (ACIF)	
Category	2018
Antibiotic	18
Birth Control	3
Controlled Drug	1
Cites*	0
Diabetes	5
Endocrine	14
Erectile Dysfunction	2
Gastrointestinal	8
Heart Disease	12
Insomnia	11
Lower Respiratory/Asthma	3
Mental Health	17
Nootropic	14

Other	18
Pain relief	6
Skin	3
Suspected Medicine	1
Unlabelled	2
Weight Loss	6
Released (no category)	29
Total Medicines	173
* Cites are medicines that contain material derived from endangered species (plant and/or animal products).	

Table five sets out the total number of medicines by category referred to Medsafe by Customs from arriving passengers at Airports in 2018. Medicines are categorised into groups based on its indicated use

TABLE FIVE: NUMBER OF MEDICINES REFERRED BY CATEGORY (AIRPORT PASSENGERS)	
Category	2018
Antibiotic	315
Baldness	3
Birth Control	23
Controlled Drug	4
Cites*	0
Diabetes	102
Endocrine	60
Erectile Dysfunction	15
Flu (cough/cold)	2
Foreign Medicine	0
Gastrointestinal	56
Heart Disease	239
Insomnia	23
Lower Respiratory/Asthma	29
Mental Health	51
Nootropic	25
Other	141
Pain relief	66
Skin	33
Unlabelled	31
Weight Loss	2
Total	1,220
* Cites are medicines that contain material derived from endangered species (plant and/or animal products).	

4. *A breakdown by which region in New Zealand the medication was destined for, for 2009 and 2019.*

Information about where medication arriving in New Zealand was destined for is not readily available. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as it cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

5. *How many referred packages were destroyed and for how many was there a valid prescription?*

Table six sets out the number of detained medicines that were seized and destroyed or subsequently released at the IMC in 2009, 2010, 2017 and 2018. Medsafe required an authorised prescriber to complete a form that is sent by Medsafe to the importer. This form meets the requirement of a prescription and requires the prescriber to accept responsibility for prescribing unapproved medicines.

TABLE SIX: NUMBER OF DETAINED MEDICINES SEIZED AND DESTROYED OR RELEASED (IMC)		
Action	Seized and Destroyed	Released
2009	7,989	3,562
2010	6,012	2,816
2017	9,038	3,128
2018	10,416	3,391

Table seven sets out the number of detained medicines that were seized and destroyed or subsequently released at the ACIF in 2018.

TABLE SEVEN: NUMBER OF DETAINED MEDICINES SEIZED AND DESTROYED OR RELEASED IN 2018 (ACIF)	
Action	Number
Seized and Destroyed	88
Released	49
Total	137

Table eight sets out the number of medicines that were seized and destroyed or subsequently released from arriving passengers at Airports in 2018.

TABLE EIGHT: NUMBER OF MEDICINES SEIZED AND DESTROYED OR RELEASED IN 2018 (AIRPORT PASSENGERS)	
Action	Number
Seized and Destroyed	887
Released	311
Total	1,198

6. *The most common countries of origin for imported medication in 2018 and 2019.*

Tables nine and ten set out the top five countries of export for imported medicine in 2017 and 2018 that passed through the IMC. As the information for 2019 is not available, I have provided the totals for the two most recent periods available.

TABLE NINE: TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF EXPORT FOR IMPORTED MEDICINE IN 2017 (IMC)		
Country	Number of Parcels	Total Percentage
India	5,054	46.6
USA	1,472	13.6
China	597	5.5
Great Britain	466	4.3
Australia	377	3.5
Other	2,883	26.6
Total	10,849	

TABLE TEN: TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF EXPORT FOR IMPORTED MEDICINE IN 2018 (IMC)		
Country	Number of Parcels	Total Percentage
India	4,970	46.9
USA	1,830	17.3
China	541	5.1
Great Britain	396	3.7
Australia	344	3.2
Other	2,517	23.7
Total	10,598	

7. *The most common reasons people give for importing medications.*

This part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as the information requested is not held by the Ministry and there are no grounds for believing that this information is held by another agency subject to the Act.

8. *Any emerging trends/concerns noted by Pharmac.*

I have interpreted this part of your request to be trends or concerns noted by the Ministry, as PHARMAC focuses on equity of access and optimal use of medicines. The Ministry does not specifically analyse this data for trends or concerns, therefore this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as the information requested is not held by the Ministry.

I trust that this information fulfils your request. Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website.

Yours sincerely



Chris James
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