

26 October 2021

s 9(2)(a)

 By email: **s 9(2)(a)**
 Ref: H202112779

 Dear **s 9(2)(a)**

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 27 September 2021 for information relating to Ivermectin. Please find a response to each part of your request below:

"I'd like to request some information under the Official Information Act regarding the number of personal attempted importations of the drug Ivermectin. Medsafe has outlined on their website that they've seen an increase recently with people trying to import this drug to use against Covid-19, even though this drug is not approved to prevent or treat Covid-19. I would like to see the specifics regarding their recent findings around this please."

The Ministry interprets 'personal attempted importations' as being personal imports through the mail and courier system. Ivermectin is a prescription medicine and can only be imported in the following circumstances:

- Importation by a person authorised to do so under the Medicines Act 1981 (known as an 'authorised prescriber'; usually a medical practitioner, but others are also entitled to do so)
- Importation on the authorisation of an authorised prescriber
- Importation by the NZ organisation or person holding the approval to market / distribute the medicine in New Zealand

Please refer to the table below. Authorisation from an authorised prescriber was received for those consignments which were released. Ivermectin that was intended for animal use was referred to the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI). The table below contains information on the personal importation of Ivermectin in New Zealand:

| | Number of consignments containing ivermectin referred to Medsafe | Number of consignments released | Number of consignments referred to MPI |
|---|--|---------------------------------|--|
| January | 4 | | 1 |
| February | 1 | | |
| March | 3 | 1 | |
| April | 1 | | |
| May | 10 | 1 | |
| June | 26 | 1 | |
| July | 31 | 3 | 1 |
| August | 51 | 11 | |
| September (up to and including 22/9/21) | 171 | 4 | |
| Total | 298 | 21 | 2 |

"I'd also like to find out how much Ivermectin is imported into New Zealand each year as well as the costs around the product too."

Information on the importation of ivermectin by authorised prescribers and the costs associated is not required to be notified to the Ministry. However, the PHARMAC Community Schedule contains information on the cost when ivermectin is supplied as a publicly funded medicine and can be found at: <https://schedule.pharmac.govt.nz/ScheduleOnline.php?osq=Ivermectin>. Information on the importation of the brand of ivermectin that has been approved for supply in New Zealand (Stromectol) may be available from the supplier, Merck Sharp & Dohme (NZ) Ltd.

"Can anyone import Ivermectin?"

Ivermectin is a prescription medicine, therefore if it is detected at the border by New Zealand Customs, it is referred to Medsafe for compliance with the Medicines Act 1981. Personal imports of ivermectin can only be released on the authority of an authorised prescriber (within their scope of practice and usually a medical practitioner). Under Section 25 of the Medicines Act 1981, and within certain controls, authorised prescribers can prescribe any medicine (including ivermectin) for the treatment of a patient under their care. This includes prescribing an unapproved medicine, or an approved medicine for an unapproved indication ("off-label" use). Further information about prescribing unapproved medicines is available at: www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/RIss/unapp.asp.

"I'd also like to know whether this myth has impacted the supply chain for its actual/proven use. Is supply for Ivermectin running low? Hard to get now?"

The information in this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as information on the supplies of Ivermectin is not reported to, or held by, the Ministry and there are no grounds for believing it is held by another agency subject to the Act.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry of Health website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases.

Yours sincerely



Chris James
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Medsafe