MHRA and CAP take action against illegal ‘hayfever jab’ adverts online

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Following several high-profile rulings by the Advertising Standards Authority, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP) have issued a joint enforcement notice about the advertising of Kenalog injections on social media.

This enforcement notice warns all organisations offering Kenalog as a hayfever treatment to stop advertising it in any of their social media or website advertising.

Kenalog is a prescription-only medicine (POM), which must not be directly or indirectly advertised to the public. Kenalog is not licensed for the treatment of hayfever in the UK, although it is offered by some beauty and aesthetics clinics, under the personal responsibility of an individual prescriber, and advertised widely on social media.

Now, advertisers must ensure that all references to Kenalog in the text, images or emojis on social media are removed, as well as commonly-used descriptive phrases for the jab such as ‘hayfever injection’ or hayfever jab’ or any account names, testimonials or memes by 29 August 2022. After this date, the CAP’s compliance team will remove non-compliant ads using targeted software and those who continue to promote it may be referred to the MHRA for further enforcement action.

Kenalog is the brand name for triamcinolone acetonide and is a steroid injection that is licensed as a medicine for a number of conditions, though not for the treatment of hayfever.

Claire Tilstone, Head of Advertising at MHRA said:

Social media offers a powerful advertising tool for clinics but

they must remain aware of the rules that surround it for medicines.

The advertising of prescription-only medicines in the UK is banned under UK advertising law and so clinics should now urgently review their websites and social media to ensure that they are not advertising the prescription-only medicine Kenalog, to avoid further enforcement action.

We would urge anyone who sees a clinic advertising it, to report it either to the MHRA or the Advertising Standards Authority, and always to consult a qualified healthcare professional to discuss options for hayfever treatment.

Shahriar Coupal, Director of CAP, has said:

Our enforcement notice, published jointly with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, makes it abundantly clear that Kenalog, as a prescription-only-medicine, should not be directly or indirectly advertised to the public. Our rules apply across media, but we are particularly concerned about the prevalence of Kenalog injection advertising on social media.

Through our use of technology and data science, we will proactively monitor and take enforcement action against any advertiser who does not stick to the rules so there is a level playing field for businesses and consumers are protected.

Notes to Editors

Kenalog is not licensed in the UK for the treatment of hayfever. A prescriber during a consultation with a patient can make a professional decision to prescribe a medicine outside the indications stated in the medicine’s licence to meet the specific clinical needs of their patient. They do this on their own personal responsibility. This further information from the GMC and this article in MHRA Drug Safety Update might be helpful background. During the consultation, patients should be made aware of any risks of using a medicine ‘off-label’ in place of a licensed treatment.

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)

is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the benefits justify any risks. MHRA is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.

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