

Reference: 01917503

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

2 December 2024

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning the promotion of steroids on social media.

We received this request on 5 November 2024 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Your request & our response

From the period 01/01/2019 until your latest data in 2024, the number of breaches made by social media companies relating to the promotion or selling of steroids on their sites. Please provide this data by month and by the site it occurred on.

From the period 01/01/2019 until your latest data in 2024, the number of complaints made against social media companies relating to the promotion or selling of steroids on their sites. Please provide this data by month and by the site it occurred on.

From the period 01/01/2019 until your latest data in 2024, the number of complaints made against social media companies relating to the promotion of harmful body images on their sites. Please provide this data by month and by the site it occurred on.

Please note that Ofcom does not have a single definition of what constitutes 'social media companies' and therefore information we hold is not categorised in this way.

We do not hold any information relating to 'breaches' made by social media companies relating to the promotion or selling of steroids on their sites.

During the time period you refer to, we have received seventeen complaints about harmful health content, five complaints about content relating to drugs, and six complaints relating to content about negative body image/excessive dieting/eating disorders. None of these complaints refer specifically to steroids. Please also note that these complaints relate to Online Safety generally, and therefore may or may not relate to what you may consider to be 'social media companies'.

We are unable to disclose which providers individual complaints related to as this information is exempt from disclosure under the FOI Act. In particular, section 44 of the FOI Act exempts disclosure of information if another enactment prohibits it. In this case, section 393 of the Communications Act 2003 prohibits Ofcom from disclosing information which relates to a business obtained in the course of exercising its functions, unless Ofcom has the consent of that business or one of the statutory gateways to disclosure under section 393(2) is met, neither of which applies here. Section 44 is an absolute exemption and does not require a public interest test.

You may find it helpful to know that the Online Safety regime does not require Ofcom to take, respond to, or adjudicate on individual complaints about online safety. However, these complaints nevertheless provide us with useful information and evidence that is relevant to how we exercise our online safety functions more widely. Like the approach Ofcom takes in telecoms regulation, we monitor trends in complaints as an indicator to help us identify where there might be issues with compliance. We also use this information to support our ongoing research into the harms experienced online and the safety measures of providers.

In our consultation Protecting Children from Harms Online, published in May 2024, we consulted on the potential harm that body image content could have on children online. Likewise, we also consulted on a definition of content focusing on harmful substances that included content promoting the use of steroids. We expect to publish our statement before the end of April 2025.

If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress.

Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).