

HFMA suggests further regulation penalises responsible brands after Which? report over supplement levels

The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) has said additional regulation only penalises responsible companies following a Which? report revealing supplements sold online contained 12.5 times the recommended limit.

The HFMA said in a statement to *Health Food Business* that, rather than further regulation for the industry as a whole, it is rogue traders that need to be targeted to handle the issue.

Following the report, HFMA Director General, Martin Last, commented: "The HFMA recognise the issues raised in the Which? article and agree that that very high vitamin and mineral doses are unnecessary and that these levels should be in line with EVM, NHS or HFMA guidelines and with the use of advisory statements where needed to ensure consumers can make informed choices at time of purchase.

"The food supplements industry is already heavily regulated and covered by existing regulations. Additional regulation as suggested in the article would only penalise most of the responsible manufacturers who already comply with the guidelines and label product correctly for UK consumers. The key issue raised by this article is the enforcement of rogue traders, those who ignore the guidelines, and products which are sold overseas which are not labelled or formulated to UK standards.

"Many of the products highlighted by the Which? report and being promoted online fall into this category of being overseas products not appropriate for the UK market. The HFMA are in regular discussion with the enforcement



authorities to explore proportionate ways to address this issue."

The comments come after the report was published and saw Which? call for better regulation of supplements after finding some contained up to 12.5 times the recommended safe upper limit. The consumer organisation says better oversight of supplements is needed after it found products containing potentially dangerous doses of popular vitamins and minerals for sale on online marketplaces.

Between September and October, Which? looked at vitamin D, A and B6, and zinc supplements listed for sale on online marketplaces including AliExpress, Amazon, eBay, Superdrug, Temu and TikTok Shop to see whether they contained safe amounts of vitamins and minerals. They were selected using recommendations for safe upper limits set by UK experts based on an assessment of the risk; safe upper levels are only specified within voluntary guidelines based on advice from the UK's Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals (EVM) and therefore, these limits are only advisory.

Which? found supplements on sale containing as much as 12.5 times the safe upper limit and in some cases without the warning statements that the supplements industry agreed with the government to provide.

Taking vitamin D as an example, Which? said the NHS recommends a daily intake of 10mcg (µg) each day but adults can safely take up to 100µg, including from food sources. Superdrug Marketplace, TikTok Shop, and eBay all listed the Nuke Nutrition 10,000 IU (250µg) vitamin D3 supplements for sale – more than double the safe upper limit. When Which? contacted Nuke Nutrition about this product, they immediately withdrew it from sale while they investigated. On AliExpress, Which? found two different vitamin D3 supplements in 50,000 IU, or 1,250µg doses – 12.5 times the recommended safe upper limit.

According to the NHS, a dose as high as 10,000 IU can put users at greater risk of hypercalcaemia – too much calcium in the blood – which can have wide-ranging consequences from vomiting and confusion, to weakening

bones and kidney failure. This type of dose might be used to treat a deficiency and taken once a week, for a short period of time, for example, six weeks, but this should only happen under a doctor's supervision.

Furthermore, some of the supplements in Which?'s investigation did not have nutrition information detailing how much of the active ingredient is in the supplement, making it nearly impossible for consumers to know how much they are taking.

Sue Davies, Which? Head of Food Policy, commented: "It's shocking that supplements containing potentially dangerous doses of popular vitamins and minerals are so readily available online. Taking more than the recommended dose of these vitamins and minerals has been linked to some really harmful side effects such as liver damage and weakened bones.

"Better regulation and oversight of the supplements industry is desperately needed so that consumers are not put at risk by regularly consuming products which contain more than the advised safe upper levels."