

The GVH has once again declared war on websites falsely advertising products as antiviral

14 December 2020, Budapest – Similarly to its sweep conducted in the spring, the Hungarian Competition Authority (GVH) has once again investigated the online commerce of products advertised as antiviral, extending the scope of the sweep to also include virus testing products. The inquiry identified several issues this time as well.

Similarly to the so-called [sweep](#) performed by the GVH during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Authority conducted another investigation into the commercial practices of websites and web-shops advertising their products (e.g. dietary supplements, masks, disinfectants) as antiviral at the beginning of December. This time around, the sweep of the GVH was complemented by an inquiry into the information provided by health care service providers performing COVID-19 testing. With the help of the sweep, the Authority obtained a general overview of how the online promotional practices of these products had changed since the situation at the beginning of the year.

The results of the sweep showed that objectionable practices continue to persist. The GVH discovered statements on several websites which claimed that the products possessed ‘*virucide*’ and ‘*antiviral*’ properties, promised ‘*99.9% effectiveness*’ against viruses, ‘*destroy the virus*’, ‘*have an anti-bacterial, fungicidal and anti-tuberculosis effect*’, etc. These statements give the impression that the concerned product is especially effective in the fight against the virus; however, it is presumed that these claims are not based on appropriate research.

Certain websites refer to licences issued by the authorities and recommendations by health organisations, which can be especially effective at gaining the trust of the consumers. However, in the case of certain products, what the website was referring to was not an official licence, just a simple registration with the authorities. Furthermore, certain recommendations are likely to be untrue; the actual endorsement of these products by the mentioned organisation cannot be verified.

The GVH also came across websites where it is presumed that negative reviews are being deleted by moderators. This means that only the publication of positive reviews can affect consumer decision-making.

In some cases, a document or instruction manual was published on a website as an official document; however, they were impossible to open in a higher resolution with any available method, rendering their contents illegible. In these cases, the documents are suspected to be displayed only as a way to increase the trust of the consumers through their existence.

In several cases, the manufacturers and distributors of the products were not indicated on the websites. As a result, it was unclear from whom exactly the consumer

would be ordering the product and to whom they could turn with their complaints, questions, or to exercise their rights.

The GVH would once again like to draw attention to the fact that there is a heightened need for the provision of fair consumer information in relation to such products and services in the current pandemic situation. In addition, the GVH asks the operators of online shops and other e-commerce websites to pay particular attention to the recommendations published by the Authority in terms of both the design and the contents of their websites. In particular, the Authority requests the cooperation of advertisers in order to ensure that, if they become aware of products or services that are being promoted in a manner that is not compliant with the requirements above, such publications are removed.

The GVH would like to ask consumers to check the reliability of websites before ordering (e.g. verify whether the undertaking is real) and the consumer reviews related to the websites as well. Furthermore, it is highly advised to take the time to become acquainted with the service conditions contained in the General Terms and Conditions (GTC). It can also be useful to store any email exchanges with the undertaking and take screenshots of the ordering process.

GVH Press Office