**Steroid abuse among young people in Czechia on rise**

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According to the Czech police, there has been a sharp increase in the number of young people taking steroids over the last few years. Experts say that social media and the pressure to achieve the “perfect body” play a significant role.

Police statistics show a marked increase in the number of intercepted postal items from abroad containing banned athletic performance-enhancing drugs in the last couple of years. While in 2020, the customs administration registered only one such case, in 2022, there were 41 cases and so far there have already been 36 this year.

The police are trying to target distributors. For example, they recently busted a criminal group that was importing anabolic steroids from China and selling them, says the director of the National Anti-

Drug Division, Jakub Frydrych:

*“The distribution was taking place mainly in Prague and the Central Bohemia region, but also via the Internet and mail order.”*

Even though police officers investigate dozens of cases related to steroids every year, according to Frydrych, their actual use in the population is many times greater.

*“Some of the users are experimenters who are trying to find a shortcut to getting the kind of body they want – at any cost. And these are very easy customers for the suppliers.”*

Steroids are supposed to only be available by prescription from a doctor, but in reality they can easily be bought on the Internet. Apart from the web, young people most often get illegal steroids from personal trainers in the gym, according to the police – something which personal trainer Jakub Prchal says is confirmed by his own experience.

*“A young boy comes and says, ‘You look good – what are you taking?’ They expect that you’ll tell them what you’re taking and then they follow up straight away with: ‘And could you please get some of that for me too? Because I’ve been coming here for three months and so far I haven’t seen any results.’ These are boys of 15, 16, 17. Before they’re even adults, they go the gym with the idea that they will take something.”*

According to Lukáš Roubík from the Institute of Modern Nutrition, social media is to blame.

*“Nowadays young people are unfortunately exposed to a number of influencers from the fields of fitness and bodybuilding talking about doping openly on social media. Beginners who have only been working out for a few weeks look for steroids on the Internet or in the gym, because social media gives them the idea that everyone is taking them and that it’s completely normal, and so they also want to speed up their results.”*

According to government agency the Czech Anti-Doping Committee, steroids are most often used to achieve results in bodybuilding. However, the authority has no jurisdiction over amateur bodybuilders and therefore says it can’t do anything in these cases.

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