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Injectable Aesthetics and Regulatory Certainty: What CDSCO's clarification means for MedTech

15 June 2026 | Views | By Rishi Agrawal, CEO, TeamLease RegTech

Regulatory certainty will become as important as technological advancement



India's aesthetics market has expanded in a regulatory grey zone for years. Injectable products that altered physiological functions often occupied an uncertain position between cosmetics and drugs. This allowed businesses to leverage differing regulatory pathways depending on how products were positioned in the market. The ambiguity is beginning to disappear with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) clarifying that injectable cosmetic products fall within the drug regulatory framework.

While much of the discussion has focused on consumer safety, the development carries broader implications for India's MedTech and healthcare innovation ecosystem. The clarification is less about restricting market growth and more about establishing regulatory certainty in a segment where product classification has remained inconsistent.

Classification is one of the most important foundations of any regulatory system. It determines evidence requirements, approval pathways, manufacturing standards, post-market obligations and ultimately the level of accountability attached to a product. When products with drug-like mechanisms and physiological effects are regulated under cosmetic frameworks, the resulting mismatch creates uncertainty for regulators, manufacturers and investors alike.

Injectable aesthetic products differ fundamentally from traditional cosmetics. Cosmetics are intended for external application and are generally designed to cleanse, beautify or alter appearance without affecting the body's structure or functions. Injectable products, by contrast, interact directly with biological systems. Whether influencing muscle activity, stimulating collagen production, or modifying tissue structure, their effects extend beyond the scope traditionally associated with cosmetic products.

Globally, regulators have largely addressed this distinction. In the United States, botulinum toxin products are regulated as prescription drugs, while European regulations limit cosmetic products to external applications. India's clarification signals greater alignment with these international principles and reflects a broader trend toward risk-based regulation.

The immediate impact will be felt through increased compliance expectations for manufacturers. Product development strategies, clinical evidence generation, manufacturing controls, import approvals, quality systems, pharmacovigilance mechanisms and post-market surveillance frameworks will require greater attention. Companies that have historically operated within drug-regulated environments are likely to adapt relatively smoothly. However, businesses that entered the market through cosmetic pathways may face significant adjustments in both timelines and compliance costs.

The clarification also highlights the growing importance of regulatory preparedness. As healthcare technologies become increasingly sophisticated, the line between consumer wellness products and regulated medical interventions continues to blur. Companies that integrate regulatory strategy into product development are likely to be better positioned than those that treat compliance as a downstream activity.

The move may ultimately improve market confidence for innovators and investors. Regulatory uncertainty often discourages long-term investment because future compliance obligations remain unclear. A more predictable classification framework creates clearer expectations regarding evidence generation, commercialisation pathways and market access requirements.

The broader lesson extends beyond injectable aesthetics. Emerging healthcare technologies, digital therapeutics, AI-enabled diagnostics, combination products and advanced wellness interventions are creating new classification challenges across the healthcare ecosystem. Regulators globally are increasingly focusing on intended use and risk profile rather than marketing labels alone.

The CDSCO clarification therefore represents more than a sector-specific intervention. It signals a regulatory philosophy that prioritises product function over product positioning. For the MedTech industry, this serves as a reminder that regulatory classification is a strategic consideration that influences innovation and long-term market success.

As India's healthcare innovation ecosystem matures, regulatory certainty will become as important as technological advancement. The aesthetics market may be the immediate focus but the implications extend much further into the future of healthcare innovation and regulation.

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