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Centre begins probe into 'syrup deaths' in Uzbekistan

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Centre begins probe into 'syrup deaths' in Uzbekistan

NEW DELHI: India has launched an inquiry into the alleged role of Dok-1 Max, a cold and flu syrup manufactured by Noida-based Marion Biotech, in the recent deaths of 18 children in Uzbekistan.

The Uzbek health ministry alleged that the kids died after drinking Dok1 Max and it contains unacceptable amounts of Ethylene Glycol (EG).

The Centre said it had received information about the incident on December 27, and immediately after that, a joint inspection of Marion Biotech's Noida facility was carried out by a team of UP drug control facility and the Central Drug Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO). "Samples of the syrup have been taken from the manufacturing premises and sent to Regional Drugs Testing Laboratory, Chandigarh for testing," Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya tweeted. "Further action as appropriate would be initiated based on the inspection report," he added.

The Uzbekistan tragedy comes weeks after a similar incident was reported from Gambia. It was alleged that 69 children died in the African nation after consuming cough syrup exported by an Indian firm. The World Health Organisation (WHO) issued a medical product alert in the matter stating that samples of the cough syrup had been found to contain unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol as contaminants.

The government, however, slammed the WHO saying the deduction that India-made cough syrup was responsible for the death of children in Gambia was premature after tests conducted on samples of the cough and cold syrups in question found the drugs to be of standard quality.

In a communication to the WHO, which issued a medical product alert linking them with the death of children in Gambia, India

said that tests carried out at a government laboratory had found all of the control samples of the four products, indicted by the global body, to be compliant with specifications.

"We should wait for the inquiry to be completed in the Uzbekistan incident before drawing any conclusion," said a health ministry official. He added that if Marion Biotech, the company that was exporting the syrup in question to Uzbekistan, is found to be supplying products of questionable quality, strict action will be taken.

According to Uzbekistan’s health ministry, children who died after consuming Dok-1 Max were suffering from an acute respiratory disease. They were given the syrup without a doctor’s prescription, either by their parents or on advice of pharmacists, with doses that exceeded the standard for children. "It is important to know about the concurrent medications these children were getting and the timing of the administration of the syrup for causality assessment. In the Gambia incident, we kept following up with the authorities in the country as well as the WHO but they did not provide documents supporting the claim," a member of the expert committee appointed to investigate the role of Indian syrup in the Gambia incident said.

However, sources said, repeated reports of such incidents may harm the country’s reputation as the pharmacy of the world and, therefore, renewed efforts are being made by the government to strengthen regulatory mechanisms for drug manufacturers.

On Tuesday, the government said it had prepared an action plan for nationwide inspection of manufacturing units which are identified to be at the risk of manufacturing Not of Standard Quality (NSQ)/adulterated/spurious drugs. Based on this plan, joint inspection of drug manufacturing units were being carried out across the country. It is not yet clear how many units have been identified for action by the government in its joint inspection which is being carried out as per the directions of Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who is also the minister of chemicals and fertilisers.