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Wednesday, November 26, 2008

## NAFDAC raises alarm as 25 die of teething mixture

- shuts down manufacturing firm  
*By Chukwuma Muanya*

**T**HE National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) yesterday raised the alarm on the circulation of a teething mixture known as My Pikin, suspected to have caused the death of no fewer than 25 children in three teaching hospitals.

NAFDAC added that more than 50 others were hospitalised with chronic kidney damage after taking the 'killer' teething mixture containing paracetamol and ethylene glycol.

It gave the breakdown of the children killed at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Idi-Araba, as 15; eight in Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital (ABUTH), Zaria and two in University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan.

A similar incident in the 90s led to the death of over 200 children at Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH), UCH and University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Enugu.

Teething mixtures are popular drugs because they usually contain paracetamol, which makes a baby not to feel pain; propylene glycol, properties similar to those of ethylene glycol and is generally recognised as safe for use in food, cosmetics, and medicines; and diphenhydramine, which induces the baby to sleep, thereby bringing relief in children growing first set of teeth.

However, diethylene glycol is sometimes used by some unscrupulous companies in order to maximise profit because it is similar to propylene glycol and cheaper.

Ethylene glycol is a colourless, odourless and sweet-tasting chemical found in many household products, including anti-freeze, deicing products, detergents, paints and cosmetics. It is poisonous if swallowed.

The first symptom of ethylene glycol ingestion is similar to the feeling caused by drinking alcohol (ethanol). Within a few hours, more toxic effects become apparent. Symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, convulsions, stupor, or even coma.

An overdose of ethylene glycol can damage the brain, lungs, liver, kidneys and lungs. The poisoning causes disturbances in the body's chemistry, including metabolic acidosis. The

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disturbances may be severe enough to cause profound shock, organ failure and death. As little as 120 millilitres of ethylene glycol may be enough to kill an average-sized man.

Meanwhile, the Director-General of NAFDAC, Prof. Dora Nkem Akunyili, said the agency had since last week commenced mopping up of My Pikin all over the country and had shut down Barewa Pharmaceuticals Limited located at 1-5 Olugbo Close Shasha Road, Akowonjo, Lagos, manufacturers of the teething mixture, until further notice.

She called on all medicine outlets, stores, clinics and hospitals to immediately withdraw from circulation all batches of My Pikin teething mixture and surrender them to the nearest NAFDAC office as failure to do so would attract severe sanction.

The NAFDAC boss enjoined the public, especially mothers, to henceforth stop the use of the teething mixture and report any suspected case to the agency for appropriate action.

Akunyili said the agency was alerted on November 19, 2008, through a pharmacist in ABUTH to the death of some children, which was suspected to be caused by the teething mixture.

She said NAFDAC immediately commenced investigation. "We visited ABUTH twice within a few hours of the same day and it was confirmed. As at November 20, 2008, 11 cases were reported, out of which eight had died and three were still on admission and under dialysis at the hospital in Zaria.

"Two of the hospitals where the two of the patients were initially admitted before being referred to ABUTH Zaria were visited and the doctors informed that the patients were brought in with fever, diarrhoea, vomiting and were unable to pass urine for seven days. Laboratory analysis of the suspected drug has revealed that a chemical diethylene glycol is the cause," she said.

Akunyili said the drugs were administered to the children in their various homes, adding that the children had earlier attended various hospitals and clinics in Kaduna. She said it was only when their conditions worsened that they came to ABUTH either on referral or on their own.

Akunyili further explained: "In the course of these investigations in Zaria at 8.30 a.m., we received unconfirmed reports that a similar situation was being experienced in UCH and LUTH. NAFDAC simultaneously and immediately went to both UCH and LUTH within an hour. In both sites, our fears were confirmed. The batch of My Pikin which most of the patients in Kaduna used is Batch 02008, manufactured in October 2008 and expiring in November 2011."

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