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## My Pikin - Death Toll Hits 50

by Yinka Shokunbi

Lagos, Dec 04, 2008 (Daily Independent/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) --

Fifty children have now died for ingesting 'My Pikin' Teething Mixture, the National Agency for Food, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) confirmed on Wednesday, as it announced that it would today take delivery of 100 doses of antidotes to neutralise the effect of the syrup.

States where children are affected include Kaduna, Lagos, Abia and Rivers.

The antidotes will be distributed to hospitals where the deaths occurred.

A statement issued by Charity Nmaju on behalf of NAFDAC Director General, Dora Akunyili, said the antidotes were imported from London as part of the efforts to halt the rising number of deaths.

The news comes as Ikem Omalu, Managing Director of Tranxell Limited, Lagos, who was arrested for allegedly selling propyleneglycol contaminated with diethyleneglycol used in producing 'My Pikin', has confessed to circulating the chemical to Gauze Pharm Limited in Enu-Ifite village in Anambra State as well as a textile manufacturer in Lagos.



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Kola Okunola, Chairman Barewa Pharmaceuticals, Lagos has also admitted in detention to purchasing 40 litres of the chemical "in a plastic jerry can and not in the original packaging."

The NAFDAC said a clinical case report from Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital (ABUTH), Zaria on Monday showed that in spite of dialysis on affected children, five more still died.

The NAFDAC said Tranxell is not a registered chemical marketer and is thus not licensed to sell chemicals.

"On investigation, we confirmed that all the raw materials that were purchased by Barewa Pharmaceuticals in the past were bought in their original packaging with their certificates of analysis, which is the right thing to do in Good Manufacturing Practice," the statement read in part.

"On this occasion, the raw material was bought in a jerry can, not the original container, and with no certificate of analysis, and this has been identified as the source of contamination with diethyleneglycol.

"This was how the poisonous chemical entered into My Pikin Teething Mixture Batch No.02008."

The NAFDAC said Omalu disclosed that he purchased the chemical from a shop in Ojota, Lagos, owned by Emeka Onwalia.

"Emeka Onwalia claimed he bought from Kenneth Azogba. Kenneth claimed that he bought from one Chinwendu Morako, who claimed that he bought from someone on the run.

"All this took place in the same open market in Ojota. The stall of the person on the run has been closed by NAFDAC. We suspect that Chinwendu Morako is not his real name. He, together with Ikem Omalu, Emeka Onwalia, Kenneth Azogba, are also unregistered.

"The chemicals marketers have been arrested by NAFDAC and are currently under detention. The marketers involved have made useful statements to the Police and investigation continues."

The NAFDAC has conducted investigation in 33 states and retrieved 2,057 bottles of My Piking.

"Out of the total, 255 bottles of batch 02008 (the contaminated batch) were recovered. A total number of My Pikin retrieved from across the country is 425 bottles, 297 from Rivers State, 81 from Kaduna State and 47 from Lagos."

However, the Nigerian Association of Industrial Pharmacists (NAIP) says it stands by Barewa Pharmaceuticals on the matter.

NAIP National Chairman, Emmanuel Ekunno, said the handling of the episode by everyone, including the NAFDAC, "has been unnecessarily sensational rather than being scientific.

"What has happened, without holding brief for Barewa, is often a rare occurrence of what could happen in the business of drug manufacturing and we cannot deny (the company) because they are our member and we stand by them in this particular matter."

But Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (PSN) President, Anthony Akhimen, berated the government over the chaotic drug distribution system that does not permit an audit trail system for recalling spurious products.

"Unless government's attitude is changed and the open drug markets spread across the nation are dismantled immediately, the nation would experience a repeat of the present death saga which may be worse than what we have ever experienced," he said.

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