WHO says India cough syrup linked to Uzbekistan deaths

Police are seen at the gate of an office of Marion Biotech, a healthcare and pharmaceutical company and a part of the Emenox Group, whose cough syrup has been linked to the deaths of children in Uzbekistan, in Noida, India [File: Anushree Fadnavis/Reuters]

Geneva, January 13 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a warning against the use of two India-made cough syrups linked to the deaths of at least 20 children in Uzbekistan. The UN agency said that the two products – AMBRONOL and DOK-1 Max – made by the Indian manufacturer

Marion Biotech were “substandard” and failed to meet quality standards.

The alert was released after at least 20 children died in Uzbekistan last month after consuming a cough syrup under the brand name Doc-1 Max. In response, India’s health ministry suspended production at the company and Uzbekistan banned the import and sale of Doc-1 Max. India has also launched an investigation into the Uzbekistan deaths.

WHO also said that laboratory analysis of AMBRONOL syrup and DOK-1 Max syrup samples “found both products contained unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol and /or ethylene glycol as contaminants” which are toxic to humans, especially to children and may result in death.

In October, WHO released another warning about another India-based drug manufacturer, Maiden Pharmaceuticals, after its cough syrups may be tied to 66 deaths in The Gambia, mostly children. Lab analysis also confirmed “unacceptable” amounts of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol, according to the WHO.

India launched a probe into Maiden Pharmaceuticals but later said the investigation had found the suspect drugs were of “standard quality.” Similarly, the Indonesian government banned all syrup and liquid medicine prescription and over-the-counter sales following the deaths of more than 100 children in the country from acute kidney injury (AKI) this year, linked to harmful substances in medicinal syrups.

Indonesian health authorities said that they were investigating an unexplained rise since January 2022 in the number of children’s deaths from AKI.

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