

## FDA raids fake thyroid drug makers in Mumbai

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MUMBAI: The State Food and Drug Administration (FDA) intelligence wing has conducted raids on manufacturers of spurious thyroid drugs and is looking into what could be a big chain of illegal drug distributors.

After receiving complaints from patients in Maharashtra and Gujarat about GlaxoSmithKline's thyroid drug Eltroxin, the FDA had opened an inquiry in December 2006. "Huge quantities of spurious versions of Eltroxin were found in Maharashtra and Gujarat," said OS Sadhvani, assistant commissioner of state FDA. "The FDA intelligence wing conducted raids at Kandivli in Mumbai and one person was arrested in the last week of January."

It was found that empty bottles and strips were collected, refilled and sold in the market. "The investigation is still on. We are in the process of estimating the quantity of spurious drugs present in the market. We are also trying to ascertain whether the manufacturer arrested in Kandivli is part of a larger chain or not," said Mr Sadhavani. The Maharashtra FDA has alerted other state FDAs, which are currently conducting their own investigations. No charges have been pressed against GlaxoSmithKline, say FDA officials. An email to GlaxoSmithKline's officials went unanswered.

Eltroxin (generic name Thyroxin) is a thyroid hormone supplement used to treat people whose bodies do not produce enough thyroid hormone. It helps reduce low thyroid symptoms like weight gain, sensitivity to cold, lack of energy and dry skin. There are alternatives to GlaxoSmithKline's drug available in the Indian market like Abbott's Thyronorm.

Drug counterfeiting remains a significant issue in India. According to the Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI), in 1995-2003, the number of spurious drugs varied from a high of 0.47% to a low of 0.24% in India. However, the industry believes the menace of counterfeit drugs is not so low. WHO estimates peg the extent of counterfeit medicines at about 6% of the world's market. The Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA), an association of 13 big domestic players, along with companies like Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline, have come together to initiate a 'Campaign Against Spurious Drugs'.

"Counterfeiting affects every company and almost every brand. The IPA has taken serious initiatives to fight drug counterfeiting in India and regularly organises raids to find out where spurious drugs are being manufactured," said DG Shah, secretary general, IPA. The efforts have paid off to some extent, with some domestic companies reporting better sales in and around New Delhi — the hotbed of the pharmaceutical counterfeiting — but overall, the situation has not changed much.

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