

## **Press Statement**

### **On the deaths of 66 children from ingestion of contaminated cough syrup from India**

**SAAP 10/01**

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The Southern African Academy of Pharmacy (SAAP) notes, with sadness, the news that at least 66 children in The Gambia may have died as a result of sub-standard cough syrup. According to the WHO and news reports, the syrup was contaminated with industrial chemicals, ethylene glycol, diethylene glycol, and possibly the microorganism, E. coli. Contamination of this nature points to poor quality management systems at the point of manufacturing and through the logistics. In this case, other products from the company such as promethazine and paracetamol may also be potentially contaminated and pose a risk to users.

Substandard and counterfeit medicines are an ongoing challenge in many African markets partly because of poor regulatory controls and also lack of manufacturing within the countries. Both aspects are easily addressable if African governments can make strategic policy and financial investments to support local industry.

It is imperative that we highlight that this tragedy would not have happened if African countries had better regulatory systems and African governments invested in the local manufacture of easy-to-manufacture essential medicines. Syrups are one of the simplest dosage forms that can be manufactured with basic mixing equipment.

We wish to strongly recommend the following:

- prosecute the offenders in this case and make sure that those implicated never operate in this industry again under any guise.
- that African governments consider banning imports of easy-to-manufacture products such as cough syrups and invest in regional and local production;
- strengthen oversight of all medicines, imported or locally manufactured, to ensure that they are safe and of good quality;
- invest in capacity building around anti-counterfeit policies and training programmes for all healthcare workers to ensure hazard identification and risk assessment at the point of medicine dispensing and use;

- create awareness of counterfeit and substandard medicines among African patients through various media / social media through schools and places of worship;
- institute low-technology trace and tracking systems for all medicines to facilitate recalls and;
- invest in the use of tried and tested, safe traditional medicines for management of self-limiting conditions.

We take this opportunity to join with the people of The Gambia at this sad time and to pass our condolences to the bereaved parents and the entire nation.

### **About the Southern African Academy of Pharmacy (SAAP)**

Southern African Academy of Pharmacy (SAAP) is an association of health care professionals, researchers and scholars with connections and continued interest in the SADC region. It is registered in the UK as a non-profit organization and sees to collaborate and work with regional and international agencies and companies in improving access to safe and affordable health care. SAAP is involved in research, convening, advocacy, teaching, and training in the region.

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