

Gambia families sue Indian drugmaker after cough syrup deaths

The relatives of 20 Gambian children whose deaths were linked to toxic cough syrups made in India have sued Indian drugmaker Maiden Pharmaceuticals as well as local authorities in the West African country, according to a case filed on Friday, 30 June.



Source: Reuters. A woman walks with her child in the paediatric emergency unit at the Edward Francis Small teaching hospital in Banjul, Gambia, November 4, 2022.

The filing, which has not yet been made public, opens a new front in the fight for compensation and justice after at least 70 children, mostly babies and toddlers, died from acute kidney injury in Gambia last year.

The filing was presented to the High Court of Gambia on Friday. In it, the families seek about \$250,000 in compensation for each child, amounting to about \$5 million for the 20 children represented.

The families are also suing Gambia's health ministry, its regulator the Medicines Control Agency, and Atlantic Pharmaceuticals, a local distributor of the tainted drugs.

A spokesperson for Gambia's judiciary confirmed that the lawsuit had been filed. None of the parties named in the lawsuit, including Maiden, responded to requests for comment by means of email, phone and text message.

"You don't have to have a child to feel what the families have gone through. It is the scariest thing," said Loubna Farage, the lead counsel in the case. "This is a system that should have taken care of them."

The World Health Organization last year linked the deaths to the consumption of four cough syrups and fever-reducing drugs made by Maiden, charges the Indian company and government deny.

This incident, and the deaths of about 20 other children in Uzbekistan, has raised concerns about lax regulation in India's \$42bn pharmaceutical industry, as well as a lack of testing capability in poorer nations such as Gambia that have no drug-making facilities.

Earlier this month, Gambia's justice minister said that the government had separately hired a US law firm to explore legal options linked to the deaths.

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