

India asks pharma to provide unhindered supply of drugs

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Singapore: The new pharma policy implemented in India last month led to many media reports of shortage of essential medicines at retail outlets. Reacting to this for the first time, the Indian government has sent out a strong message to drug companies and trade channels to ensure that availability of these drugs is unperturbed.

Reports had identified that supplies of popular pain relievers paracetamol and diclofenac, treatment for worms albendazole and those used in chronic ailments like cholesterol-lowering drug atorvastatin, diabetes drug metformin and blood pressure drug enalapril have been hindered post the implementation of the new policy.

In a strongly worded letter to pharma companies and distribution channels, India's drug pricing regulator, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) warned that the Essential Commodities Act may be invoked against those who disrupt the supply and distribution of essential medicines.

Further, the letter stated that as per the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO) of 2013, consumers cannot be charged anything more than the price notified by the government for any drug formulation.

In July, the government had prepared a National List of Essential Medicines and had notified those with ceiling prices of certain medicines from the list. NPPA's letter added that the DPCO 2013 explains how no manufacturer can refuse to sell a

drug to a distributor while no distributor can withhold the sale of a drug to a consumer planning to purchase the medicine.

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Reports had emerged earlier last month from states like Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal and Jharkhand that supplies of important medicines were halted as stockists and retailers protested against the trade margins. As a reaction, many drugs companies like Cipla, Mankind Pharma, FDC and Torrent are said to have increased trade margins for stockists and retailers.

The NPPA has asked the drug regulatory body to make sure supply of these medicines is not affected in all states.