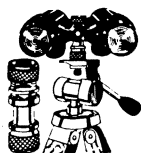


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PUBLIC HEALTH

Infected Drugs Recalled

► IF YOU ARE allergic to penicillin, you can thank the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for controlling inadvertent contamination of other drugs with the antibiotic.

FDA early this year requested tests for safety levels of penicillin that had become mixed with common drugs.

"Drug firms are cooperating fully in the effort to eliminate all possibility of cross-contamination in their plants," FDA Commissioner George P. Larrick said in Washington, D.C.

With few exceptions pharmaceutical manufacturers are recalling products that exceed the low FDA "tolerances" set with the help of an advisory committee of physicians from Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Columbia University and other institutions, Commissioner Larrick said. He added that FDA intends to enforce its tolerance ruling, however, and will "initiate court action" if firms do not comply.

No cases of penicillin-sensitive individuals being killed by other drugs containing the antibiotic have been reported, but FDA and its committee decided that no injectable drugs should contain more than 0.05 unit of penicillin. Oral drugs such as aspirin, for example, should contain less than 0.5 unit of penicillin per maximum single dose.

Although the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association considers the FDA ruling impractical, at least one company, E. R. Squibb & Sons, in New York, began making penicillin in an area isolated from other drugs some six months before the FDA requirement was made public on Jan. 28 of this year.

Bristol Laboratories, Syracuse, N.Y., one of the largest producers of penicillin, is putting up a one million dollar building for the manufacture of the antibiotic, Dr. Harold Frediani of Bristol told SCIENCE SERVICE. Dr. Frediani is chairman of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association committee that meets with FDA on the problem. He said, however, that the FDA request is unrealistic.

Merck & Co., Inc., Rahway, N.J., said their penicillin is being made in a different part of the plant from other drugs so they are not finding the FDA request much of a problem. Chas. Pfizer & Co., Inc., New York, said the FDA request could be met easily.

FDA says there are approximately 100 firms that process penicillin and other drugs in the same establishment. Of these, 24 firms are currently recalling batches of some 96 different drug products. Such recalls vary from a single lot to 200 batches of one item.

Complete inspection of all firms that produce penicillin along with other drugs is being made by FDA representatives. Samples of their non-antibiotic drugs are being screen-tested in the FDA laboratories at Cincinnati, Philadelphia and Detroit. At the same time the drug companies are also testing their products by FDA-approved methods.

The contamination of other drugs by penicillin is not due to unclean vats where both are made. FDA says it appears to have occurred because air currents in the plants can carry penicillin dust to areas where other drugs are made.

FDA's advisory committee said it recognized that the risk from penicillin contamination of drugs was small. It said elimination of inadvertent contamination was particularly recommended for injected drugs in order to reduce the hazard to hypersensitive persons.

• Science News Letter, 87:350 May 29, 1965

PHYSIOLOGY

Another Blood Factor Discovered by Research

► THE BRISBANE RED CROSS blood bank has discovered a new blood group factor, probably present in four out of every 10 people.

This is the second new blood group discovered by the blood bank's research team. The bank's director, Dr. A. E. Shaw, said the new blood group had not yet been named.

Samples of the new group factor would be sent to the Commonwealth Serum Laboratory, Melbourne, and to blood group reference laboratories throughout the world for conformation, he said.

"Although the group factor is common to 40% of people, until this discovery there was no means of detecting it," said Dr. Shaw. "After six weeks of intensive work it seems highly probable that this new group factor is related to the MNS blood group family. But our studies are not complete.

Dr. Shaw said the bank serologists and research workers traced the new group factor when asked for help by a country hospital having trouble finding suitable blood for a transfusion for a woman patient.

• Science News Letter, 87:350 May 29, 1965

PUBLIC HEALTH

Soft Water Linked With Heart Disease

► THE RECENT observation in the United States and Japan that a higher incidence of heart disease arises in soft-water areas than in hard-water areas has been confirmed by research in Sweden, it was reported in Stockholm.

Data on causes of death from 1950 to 1960 was gathered from all cities and towns in Sweden with populations of more than 25,000.

A comparison then was made between the data obtained and the characteristics of the water supply during the same period at each of the centers concerned.

A direct relationship was established between the "softness," low mineral content, of the water and the incidence of heart disease. The reasons underlying this connection, however, remain unexplained.

• Science News Letter, 87:350 May 29, 1965