

Patent fight in India centers on AIDS drug

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A patent application covering tenofovir, a major AIDS drug, has started a major patent fight in India.

If the drug is granted a patent, the manufacture of cheaper versions of tenofovir in India will become illegal, making the drug too expensive for many patients in developing nations, The International Herald Tribune reported Thursday.

The suit challenges Indian patent laws designed to control that country's large pharmaceutical industry, which has long specialized in making cheaper copies of Western manufactured medicines, the newspaper said.

The Indian patent office says it has received about 9,000 patent applications, most from international pharmaceutical companies.

But patient advocates warn the developing world's access to a wide range of vital generic drugs made in India might become jeopardized.

The Delhi Network of Positive People and the Indian Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS filed a formal protest Tuesday to a patent application from U.S.-based Gilead Sciences for the drug tenofovir.

The patient rights group argues tenofovir is not a new drug, just a modified version of an earlier drug, and therefore is not eligible for a new patent under India's laws.

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