

US takes aim at purported sex disease 'cures'

May 3 2011, by Kerry Sheridan

The US government said Tuesday it is taking steps to remove from the market a host of online products that promise to cure HIV, herpes, chlamydia and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The products, mainly sold on the Internet but also available in some retail outlets, include names like Medavir, Herpaflor, Viruxo, C-Cure, and Never An Outbreak.

They are distributed by 11 US companies targeted in the joint action by the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission.

"When it comes to health products, the Internet can be a toxic wasteland for consumers," said Richard Cleland, assistant director of the division of advertising practices at the Federal Trade Commission.

"We have reviewed the claims on the websites and we find them to be extremely problematic."

One Texas-based company promotes a product called "oil of oregano" on its website and lists AIDS, anthrax, genital herpes, gonorrhoea and syphilis among its "uses."

Another company advertises "breakthrough nutritional science" to "stop current outbreaks and eliminate future ones" in herpes sufferers.

"Just say 'No!' to expensive prescription drugs and risky herpes treatments," the website says, alongside a testimonial that claims: "I can

finally say I no longer have herpes."

There is no cure for herpes, though some federally approved antiviral medications are available that may lessen the severity of outbreaks.

"These products are dangerous because they are targeted to patients with serious conditions, where treatment options proven to be safe and effective are available," said Deborah Autor, director of the Office of Compliance in FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research.

"Consumers who buy these products may not seek the medical attention they need and could spread infections to sexual partners."

The FDA and FTC "issued multiple letters to companies warning that their products violate federal law," an FDA statement said.

The letters notify the 11 companies involved that they have 15 days to correct any violations, or face "legal action, including seizure and injunction, or criminal prosecution," it said.

"It is unlawful... to advertise that a product can prevent, treat, or cure human disease unless you possess competent and reliable scientific evidence, including, when appropriate, well-controlled human clinical studies, substantiating that the claims are true at the time they are made," the letters note.

All were sent to companies with US addresses, and FDA officials said they had no further information on where the products were being made, whether in the United States or abroad.

Officials also noted that they have no specific reports of injury as a result of people taking the products, and they could not estimate how widely the products are being used by the American public.

"The joint action is the first step in keeping these unproven items from being sold to the public and preventing consumers from being misled," the FDA statement said.

Some of the products are marketed as "dietary supplements" but since they promise to treat disease they cannot be sold via interstate commerce without an FDA approval for a new drug application.

"These illegal products could pose significant health risks," said Howard Sklamberg, director of the FDA's Office of Enforcement in the Office of Regulatory Affairs.

"Consumers and health professionals should know that there are simply no over-the-counter or online drugs or supplements available to treat or prevent STDs," he told reporters.

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