

France may order 30,000 women to remove implants

December 20 2011, by Olivier Thibault

Up to 30,000 French women and perhaps tens of thousands more around the world may need to have defective breast implants removed after several suspicious cancer cases, officials said Tuesday.

A decision on whether to order the removal of the implants, produced by the Poly Implant Prothese (PIP) company, will be made by the end of the week, after a report from the National Cancer Institute on December 23.

"Today, we're in the process of evaluating these breast implants because of the apparent cancer risk," said government spokeswoman Valerie Pecresse.

"The government will announce its action plan between now and the end of the week," she added in an appearance on the LCI television news network.

A health ministry official said no "causal link" between the implants and cancer had yet been established and that "there is no urgent health risk".

Quoting several senior medical officials, French newspaper Liberation reported Tuesday that the decision had already been made and that health authorities will order the implants to be removed.

It was not immediately clear how many foreign women have been given PIP products but the firm was once the world's third-largest producer of

silicone implants, producing 100,000 per year and exporting 80 percent of its output.

Liberation said 300,000 women around the world had received PIP implants.

PIP was shut down and its product banned last year after it was revealed to have been using non-authorized silicone gel that caused abnormally high rupture rates of its implants.

Health officials said last week that eight cases of cancer, mainly breast cancer, had been reported in women who had received the PIP implants.

"It is urgent for all women who have PIP implants to return to see their surgeons," Pecresse, the French government spokeswoman, told LCI television, adding that costs of removal would be covered by state health insurance.

She said that, before the government announces its action plan this week, "we must first of all proceed with a census of women who received these implants and are potentially in danger."

Prosecutors in Marseille, near the firm's home base of Seyne-sur-Mer, have received more than 2,000 complaints from women who received the implants and have opened a criminal investigation into the firm.

Laurent Lantieri, one of France's best-known cosmetic surgeons and a member of a health department committee on the issue, told Liberation there was no choice but to order the implants' removal.

"We all agree on the necessity of this decision," he said.

"We are facing a health crisis linked with a fraud. The entire profession

is aware of this. There is no urgency but we no longer have any choice -- all these implants must be removed."

So far 523 women who received PIP implants have had them removed, Liberation said.

The newspaper quoted France's director general for health, Jean-Yves Grall, as saying that while the state would cover the costs of removing implants, it would not pay for implanting new ones unless the women involved had reconstructive surgery following a mastectomy.

"This does not shock me," Lantieri said. "It is not up to society, in a time of crisis, to pay for a new implant for aesthetic reasons."

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