

China launches nationwide vaccine sector inspection after scandal

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China's drug regulator said it has launched a nationwide inspection of vaccine production as authorities step up the response to a fraud case that has re-ignited public fears over the safety of the country's medicines.

The State Drug Administration (SDA) said in an announcement issued late Wednesday that it had dispatched inspection teams "to thoroughly investigate the whole process and entire chain of [vaccine production](#) of all vaccine producers".

The move comes as authorities rush to bolster public confidence in the country's vaccines, which have been hit by repeated questions about safety and reliability over the years.

China's latest product-safety scare emerged more than a week ago with news that major pharmaceutical manufacturer Changchun Changsheng Biotechnology had fabricated records and was ordered to cease production of rabies vaccines.

The case leapt to the top of the national agenda last weekend as parents and other consumers vented their anger and frustration at manufacturers and the regulators tasked with supervising them.

The government said the problematic rabies vaccine did not leave Changsheng's factory and was not put up for sale.

But anger and fear over the failures were quickly exacerbated by additional revelations: the company's vaccine for diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus (DPT) had also failed to meet quality standards, with 250,000 doses sold to Shandong province last year.

Further damaging [public confidence](#), authorities in the northern province of Hebei announced Monday that nearly 150,000 people had received sub-standard DPT vaccines made by another firm, Wuhan Institute of Biological Products.

'Vile' actions

The problems have rekindled already deep fears over domestically made medicines and driven worried parents online to swap information on obtaining imported vaccines, with some vowing not to give their children Chinese-made drugs.

The depth of public outrage revealed on social media appeared to have caught authorities off-guard, and national leaders have scrambled in recent days to vow a thorough safety clean-up of the pharmaceutical sector.

Police in the northeastern city of Changchun announced on Tuesday that 15 people, including the company's chairwoman, had been arrested on "suspicion of criminal offences".

President Xi Jinping—on a trip to Africa—weighed in earlier this week by calling the vaccine company's actions "vile in nature and shocking", according to state media.

In a further demonstration of government concern, China's cabinet—the State Council—sent a team to Changsheng's home province of Jilin to investigate the case with a mandate "to resolutely guard the safety

bottom line and maintain social security and stability", the official Xinhua news service said Thursday.

China is regularly hit by scandals involving sub-par or toxic food, drugs and other products, despite repeated promises by the ruling Communist Party to address the problem.

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