

Cipla likely to restart supply of AIDS drugs

DIGBIJAY MISHRA

New Delhi, 12 January

Cipla might re-start supplying anti-HIV drugs to the National Aids Control Organisation (Naco) in the next two months.

The Mumbai-based drug company had, during the second half of last year, stopped bidding for Naco tenders, it is learnt.

Cipla confirmed it had participated in the Naco's paediatric tenders, which were being evaluated. "Once the applications are checked, Naco will place orders. No orders have been placed by Naco so far. It is believed this process will take two months," a statement from the company said.

According to Naco, arrangements had been made to ensure smooth supply of key drugs. "While we have some quantity from Cipla as donation, their regular supplies are likely to start from next month (January)," Naco had said in December.

Of 2.1 million HIV/AIDS patients in India, close to 750,000 rely on free drugs, which were in acute short supply at the end of 2014.

The National Programme for AIDS Control provides 15 free anti-retroviral drugs used in first line, second line and paediatrics combination/regimen. The drugs are dispensed by state-run health care providers supplied by Naco through a tender process.

Naco said it had no stock out of 14 drugs and supplies of the LPV/r syrup used as a paediatric



A file photo of the building of Mumbai-based firm Cipla

drug had reached a critical level at the end of its shelf life in December.

Industry sources said Naco's supplies had run out because of delayed payments to drug companies. Selling the drugs through other avenues or exporting them yields more revenue to the companies.

Cipla is one of the major AIDS drug suppliers among Indian drug firms. The United Nations reckons India has the third-highest number of people living with HIV in the world.

The country has 40 per cent of people infected with the deadly virus in the Asia-Pacific region.

Indian drug companies are among the largest suppliers of generic medicines, but price controls have affected production. Recently, the National Human Rights Commission wrote to the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, criticising its decision to withdraw a price control decision on 108 cardiovascular and anti-diabetes drugs.

Gork