

Govt cracks down on sale of chemical used to raise milk supply from cows

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NEW DELHI: Three ministries are coming together to stop the under-cover sale of Oxytocin, a hormone-like chemical used to pump up milk production in dairies, but at the cost of harming cows.

While the government banned the retail sale of Oxytocin last year, its illegal availability and growing overuse has alarmed animal rights activist Maneka Gandhi, a key member in the initiative, which also involves the health ministry and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

In October, the Centre confiscated over 600,000 vials of Oxytocin in a country-wide raid conducted under the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI). "We plan to take help from Interpol and CBI," DCGI N Singh told HT. "We are also seeking help from the PMO and the office of Maneka Sanjay Gandhi."

The ban restricts manufacturers of Oxytocin from selling it to only those with licences to make



Cow milk accounts for the bulk of milk production in India

the drug formulations. The drug makers can supply it directly only to veterinary hospitals.

The DCGI has asked state drug controllers to provide information regarding licences issued for the manufacture of bulk Oxytocin, Oxytocin formulation. "We have requested Kolkata-based Central Drugs Laboratory to develop rapid test for detection of Oxytocin as the drug is filled

in unlabelled plastic bottles. This will help in detection of clandestine consignments, which otherwise do not come under the ambit of the D&C Act," a senior health ministry official said.

The government may also ask the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which controls production of milk, to find ways to make use of Oxytocin for production of

milk as an offence under their Act.

"Oxytocin is also being imported from China. Xio Qiang Changzhou, Chinese oxytocin manufacturer, is sending it as custom peptide (a compound consisting of two or more amino acids linked in a chain) to many individuals, supplied through courier agencies such as Fedex," Singh said. The drug is smuggled into India at a much cheaper rate mainly through Bihar and Bengal.

While no official estimates are available on the death of cows due to the overuse of oxytocin, the health ministry has found that 'the cows become barren over a period of three to four years because of continuous use of Oxytocin injections two to three times a day'. They have to suffer labour pains every time they are injected, affecting the tenacity of the uterus. "The consequence of this is that the livestock numbers are slowly dwindling," Singh said.

"The milk from such cows will have adverse effect on users especially children," said Vikrant Tongad, environmental activist.

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