

Govt flip-flop on pioglitazone hits sales

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Companies making pioglitazone, the anti-diabetes drug that was first banned and later allowed to be sold with a warning on the pack in the country, have seen revenues dip for the drug in the past few months.

According to latest market estimates, pioglitazone sales have dipped 42 per cent between May and August. Though sales picked up slightly in September, they are still much below the pre-ban level. Industry experts and medical practitioners say after the government had once banned the drug, patients became sceptical of it.

Companies such as Sun Pharma, Lupin and Abbott sell pioglitazone in India, the market for which is estimated to be ₹700 crore annually.

According to latest data by pharma market researcher IMS Health India, medicines containing pioglitazone clocked sales of ₹29 crore and ₹38 crore in August and September, respectively. This is much below the ₹50 crore in May and ₹46 crore in June.

The Union government had suspended the sale of pioglitazone in July this year after seven cases of its causing potential risk of bladder cancer were reported in Chennai. However, following strong opposition from the industry and recommendations from the medical fraternity in favour of the drug, the government revoked the ban in August and instead asked companies to carry a boxed warning highlighting risks from its use. According to a pharmaceutical company official, prescriptions of the drug have been hit after the suspension with many doctors thinking twice before recommending it. "Instead they are depending on other class of medicines," said the official.

Industry.