

Products containing phenylpropanolamine (PPA) Cough medicines off shelves at Stouffville pharmacies

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Stouffville pharmacists are pulling cough medicines off the shelves and issuing warnings to their customers after a United States health agency announced that many over-the-counter cold medications contain a health threatening ingredient.

Health Canada has not, as yet, issued a product recall order. Instead, drug store officials are using their own discretion when dealing with the situation. Drug companies, including Pharmasave, are now ordering their products removed from the shelves.

Pharmacist Farid Wassef of Guardian-Houston Pharmacy is keeping his eyes on the cough medicine shelves at his Main Street store.

If a customer selects a brand containing phenylpropanolamine (PPA), Wassef intervenes, suggesting they not buy such products as Dimetappex, Entex A, many Triaminic cold remedies and Alka-Seltzer Plus. "There are quite a number of products without PPA available," Wassef stressed.

PPA has been linked to bleeding strokes in adults under 50, particularly women. Studies show women taking PPA are between three and 16 times more apt to have a stroke and bleed into the brain. "That's a substantial risk," said Wassef.

While the FDA is working towards banning PPA, it's asking

pharmacists to voluntarily stop selling any products with the questionable ingredient.

In total, there are 63 products in Canada that contain PPA. Of the 500 over-the-counter cold medications, fewer than 10 per cent contain PPA.

Pharmacist Kathy Bradshaw has voluntarily removed all products containing PPA products from the shelves at the local IDA Drug Store.

"There's no need to take a product that has a risk if there is an alternative. There are plenty to chose from."

—Stouffville IDA pharmacist Kathy Bradshaw

"There's no need to take a product that has a risk if there is an alternative," said Bradshaw. "There are plenty to chose from."

After the U.S. Drug and Food Administration issued its warning, Health Canada put out a health advisory recommending that consumers not use any products containing PPA until the department completes a full evaluation of the scientific and medical questions containing the ingredient.

Pharmacists across Canada, including those in Stouffville are waiting for further direction from Health Canada. "So far, they (Health Canada) have yet to pro-

vide us with a list," said Farid.

Sandra Liaros, store manager of Shoppers Drug Mart, has pulled all the questionable products off the shelves.

As well, Shoppers Drug Mart has issued an advisory to anyone having PPA products in their home medicine cabinet.

"They can return the products for a full refund even if a receipt is not available," said Liaros.

Stouffville residents are asking questions. "We've had calls. It is a concern," said Liaros.

This health problem is further compounded in the United States where many over-the-counter weight loss products contain PPA. In Canada, PPA is not allowed in diet medications, Farid pointed out.

"The young women are overweight which increases their risk factor. They take the product and further increase the risk of a stroke. But, there are no PPA in diet products in Canada," said Wassef.

While pharmaceutical manufacturing companies across North America are dealing with the PPA element, it is not an issue with the Stouffville-based Nova Pharm.

"We do not make any products with PPA," said company vice president David Windrow. Over-the-counter medications are not manufactured at the Main St. W. plant. "We only deal with prescription drugs," said Windrow.



PHOTO/JOAN RANSBERRY

Stouffville's Main Street Houston Central Pharmacy pharmacist/owner Farid Wassef points to some of the products containing the banned drug ppa.

Free flu shots at town offices

Markham Stouffville Hospital is coming to Stouffville this month, armed with freebies.

Free flu shots will be given at the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville council chambers, fourth floor at 37 Sandiford Dr., on Nov. 20, 23, 27 and 30 from 5:30-8:30 p.m. on all four dates.

The clinics are being staged by the family doctors of the hospital and York Region Public Health. The shots are available to Ontario residents with

health cards.

"Your family doctor is your best resource person," said hospital spokesperson Pamela Brodie. "Residents should see their family doctor or access these clinics."

People attending to get flu shots will be asked for their name, date of birth, doctor's name and health card.

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