

‘Maharashtra tops list of drug samples failing FDA tests’

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MUMBAI: About 8% of the drug samples from Maharashtra tested by the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), either had chemicals other than the prescribed dose or were filled with contaminants such as corn starch, potato starch or chalk. A report revealed a data by Union health ministry.

Union minister of state for Health and Family welfare, Ashwini Kumar Choubey, on December 13, told the Lok Sabha that between 2014-15 and 2018-19, of the 20,352 samples tested in the Maharashtra, 1,661 drugs were found to be substandard, making it the state with the highest rate of drug samples failing the FDA test.

Across India, 4% (15,517) samples of the total 3,84,200 tested drugs failed FDA standards.

Maharashtra has a ₹5,000-crore drug manufacturing industry, with 1,400 drug-producing units in the state. However, owing to unregulated drug market, sub-standard drugs are commonly available.

“On an everyday basis, we conduct raids at different places and seize faulty medicines. But when it goes to court, the accused get bail after paying a small amount. The rules are extremely lenient so the same violators keep repeating the crimes,” said a senior FDA official.

Abhay Pandey, president of All Food and Drugs Licence Holders Foundation, said FDA does not have enough manpower to act against illegal units.

“Currently, there are around 46% vacancies in various posts of FDA. If the agency does not have the required strength, how will it keep a check on illegally-operating hubs? Also, the rate of conviction rate is only 5-10%,” he said.

Health professionals raised the need to make citizens aware of fake medicines.

“The authorities concerned need to come up with more secured security features for medicines. In the United States (US), each strip of medicine has a unique barcode which helps buyers to verify the authenticity of the drugs,” said health activist Dr Ravikanth Singh.