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GSK dumps live polio virus into Belgian rivers used for swimming and fishing

by David Gutierrez, staff writer

(NaturalNews) Pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) dumped 45 liters (12 gallons) of live, concentrated polio virus into a Belgian river on September 2, according to a press release by the country's Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment's Scientific Institute of Public Health (WIV-ISP).

Poliomyelitis, more commonly known simply as "polio," is a viral disease that is typically transmitted between people via the fecal-oral pathway. In 90 percent of cases, the disease produces no noticeable symptoms. In about 1 percent of cases, the virus spreads into the nervous system and preferentially destroys motor neurons in the spinal cord, brain stem and the brain's motor cortex. This produces the paralysis characteristic of the disease.

Swimming, fishing may cause exposure

According to the press release, "human error" resulted in the polio virus entering the water supply in Rixensart city, Belgium, at a plant manufacturing the polio vaccine. The contaminated water then flowed to a water treatment plant, and from there into the Lasne and Dyle rivers.

"The liquid was [expelled], according to initial information provided by the firm GSK, due to human error during the process of vaccine production," the press release said, as translated by Google. "The water from the treatment plant in question is not discharged to the supply network for drinking water."

No official explanation has been given for the human error, though some media sources reported that an employee made a mistake during routine cleaning of a tank at the plant.

The WIV-ISP said that, because polio vaccination rates are so high in Belgium (vaccination is compulsory, and compliance is estimated at around 95 percent), the risk to swimmers and fishermen in the contaminated rivers is "limited."

"The risk of people exposed to contaminated water developing poliomyelitis is extremely limited, given the high level of dilution and the high incidence of vaccination among the population," the press release said, as reported by *Flanders Today*.

Nevertheless, workers at the water-treatment plant were all re-vaccinated, and the WIV-ISP recommended that people exposed to the river water consult their doctors about that possibility as well. The WIV-ISP also advised avoiding contact with the water.

"For precautionary measures, samples of sludge and water from the treatment plant, the Lasne and Dyle will be taken to permit an assessment of the persistence of the virus," the press release said. "Pending these results, it is advised to avoid contact with the water downstream of the WWTP Rosieres, to the confluence of the Lasne with Dyle."

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) appears to be taking the risk more seriously, however. The agency noted that the Dyle eventually joins up with the Escaut/Scheldt river, which flows through an area of the Netherlands with high populations of orthodox Protestants with low vaccination rates. This population might be at higher risk of infection if exposed to contaminated water or mud, the ECDC said.

History of lethal vaccine "errors"

The vaccine manufacturing mix-up is only the latest scandal for GSK, the world's third-largest pharmaceutical company. In 2010, FDA tests uncovered traces of swine virus in the company's Rotarix (rotavirus) vaccine. In addition, traces of avian leukosis virus were found in the company's measles vaccine, and traces of simian retrovirus in the RotaTeq vaccine.

In 2012, a confidential GSK document was leaked to the press, revealing that over the course of two years, 36 infants had died following vaccination with the company's 6-in-1 shot Infanrix Hexa. The same report documented 1,742 instances of adverse reactions to Infanrix Hexa, 503 of them considered extremely serious.

The same year, the Argentinean government fined the company for causing the deaths of 14 babies during illegal vaccine trials between 2007 and 2008.

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