

Health

Merck to study Keytruda

Expired 'drugs' may remain effective, safe to use: study

NEW YORK, Feb 21, (RTRS): Even medicines that are years past their expiration date and haven't always been kept in strict climate-controlled conditions may still retain their original potency, a small study suggests.

That is good news for people working in remote areas of the world where sometimes an expired medication is the only one available and the alternative is having no way to treat a serious illness, the study authors write in the journal *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine*.

Ethical

"The expiry date on a drug packet is the last date a drug company will guarantee the drug content and stability when stored in the recommended conditions and in the original packaging," said lead study author Dr Emma Browne of the British Antarctic Survey Medical Unit in Plymouth, UK.

"This date is not necessarily the point at which the drug becomes ineffective or dangerous, and for many medications, this window may be far longer than the usual two-to-three-year expiry date," she told Reuters Health by email.

In some parts of the world, doctors face the difficulty of getting medicine more than once a year. It can also be costly for small communities or expedition groups to replace unused drugs "just in case," she added.

"The doctor must decide if it is safer to give an out-of-date medication or not treat a condition and hope the person gets better, which is a huge ethical dilemma," she said. "As we push the boundaries of exploration, for example with missions to Mars, the long-term stability of medications becomes even more important."

The study team tested the stability of five expired drugs that had been returned from the British Antarctic Survey, which operates five bases and two ships in the Antarctic region and has on-site medical and dental facilities. Drugs for the Antarctic operation are ordered an-

nually in May and shipped from the UK in September, arriving at the bases in December after spending several months at sea, the researchers note.

The fresh drugs sent to the Antarctic are transported in the ship's hold, which is not temperature controlled, and the ship passes through the tropics for approximately three weeks, then ultimately drugs are transported to the base in temperatures far below freezing. The drugs tested by Browne's team made this trip a second time, when they were returned because they had passed their expiration date, the authors add.

They tested five types of drug, all one to four years past expiration, and compared these to fresh samples of the same medications to see if the expired versions were chemically stable and retained their active ingredient.

The drugs included atropine, which is used to treat certain types of pesticide or nerve agent poisonings; nifedipine, a calcium channel blocker that relaxes the heart and blood vessels in cases of high blood pressure and chest pain; flucloxacillin, an antibiotic in the penicillin family; bendroflumethiazide, a diuretic used to treat hypertension; and naproxen, a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) painkiller.

Researchers found that all of the tested drugs were stable, and would, theoretically, have still been effective.

Also:

NEW YORK: Merck & Co Inc has said that it was launching three late-stage studies for its cancer immunotherapy Keytruda as a combination treatment for prostate cancer after the drug showed anti-tumor activity in an early-stage trial.

The interim findings of the trial testing Keytruda in combination with other cancer drugs such as Lynparza, which it jointly develops and sells with AstraZeneca, and chemotherapy docetaxel showed anti-tumor activity, Merck said.

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Friendly texts tied to fewer suicide attempts in the military

Younger siblings more likely to be bullied

NEW YORK, Feb 21, (RTRS): That younger siblings are most likely to experience bullying within a family, and the eldest is most likely to do the bullying may not come as a surprise to those who grew up in large broods.

The bigger the family, the more likely there will be bullying within sibling ranks, a UK study suggests.

Within larger families, the babies are most likely to be bullied while the perpetrators are probably boys and probably the oldest kids in the house, researchers found. But among kids who were involved in bullying at all, the majority were both bully and victim at different times.

Identifying the factors that influence a child's risk for being on either side of the bullying dynamic could help in formulating ways to avert this behavior, the authors write in *Developmental Psychology*.

"Most importantly, sibling bullying was not related to whether this was a two- or single-parent household, income or social class - it occurs in poor and rich families alike," said study co-author Dieter Wolke, a psychology researcher at the University of Warwick in Coventry.

Roughly 85 percent of children grow up with at least one other child in the family, Wolke's team notes. While these are some of the longest-lasting close relationships for many people, they can also be characterized by escalating conflicts that lead to lasting physical and mental health problems.

For the current study, researchers analyzed data on 6,838 British children born in 1991 and 1992, as well as their mothers.

Bullying

When children were 5 years old, their mothers reported how often kids were victims or perpetrators of bullying in the household. Then, when kids reached age 12, they reported their own experiences with bullying in the previous six months as well as the age when they first were involved in this behavior as a victim or perpetrator.

Researchers defined sibling bullying as psychological abuse like saying nasty or hurtful things, physical abuse like hitting or kicking or pushing, or emotional abuse like telling lies or spreading hurtful rumors. They put kids in four categories based on their experiences: victims, bullies, bully-

victims who experienced this as both targets and perpetrators, and those who didn't have any involvement with these behaviors at all.

They also looked at individual family, parent and child characteristics like total number of kids at home, mother's marital status, family socioeconomic background, and exposure to domestic violence or child abuse.

Overall, 28 percent of the kids in the study were involved in bullying as victims, perpetrators, or both.

Psychological abuse was most common, affecting 41 percent of victims and practiced by 34 percent of perpetrators.

A total of about 11 percent of the kids were both bullies and victims, the study found. About 10 percent reported being only victims and 7 percent were only perpetrators.

"There are many ways bullying is carried out in families," said Bonnie Leadbeater, a psychology researcher at the University of Victoria in Canada.

"Sometimes it is hidden by the victim who fears getting the bully into trouble," Leadbeater, who wasn't involved in the study, said by email.

"One way that parents can prevent

bullying and victimization is by coaching children through strategies about how to handle challenging situations (like disagreements with siblings)," said Stevie Grasseti, a psychologist at West Chester University in Pennsylvania.

Also:

NEW YORK: Military service members who are at risk for suicide may be less likely to attempt to harm themselves when they receive supportive text messages, a US study suggests.

Soldiers in the study had all received behavioral health services for considering or attempting suicide in the past, and all were on active duty, in the Reserve or in the National Guard. They all received standard treatments like medication or psychotherapy as needed; half of the 650 participants were also randomly assigned to receive occasional texts with messages like "hope you're having a good day."

Over the course of a year, people who received these texts were 44 percent less likely to experience suicidal thoughts and 48 percent less likely to attempt suicide than those who didn't get the messages.

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