Aventis Pasteur MSD and vaccine shortage

How long will Aventis Pasteur MSD continue to abuse physicians, pharmacists and their young patients?

It seems that the first important vaccine shortages occurred in 1997 (1-5). For more than 6 years now, despite letters announcing an end to these problems, nothing has changed: supplies of Tetracoq® , Pentacoq® , DT Polio® and Monovax® have an annoying tendency to dry up. The worst case is that of DT Polio® which cannot, in principle, be replaced with another product (although sales reps suggest using Revaxis®, which is twice as costly) (a). The result is a needless multiplication of appointments (the yearly visit and vaccination cannot be reliably programmed for the same day), sorely trying our patience.

Does this deplorable situation have to reach the attention of the national press before Aventis Pasteur MSD decides to act?

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Selected letters addressed to physicians by Aventis Pasteur MSD (our translation from the French):

● "You will be aware of the supply problems with the DT Polio®, DTP Pasteur® and Pentacoq® vaccines, since the spring of 2000. These difficulties are linked to a formulation error, meaning that a batch could not be marketed. In an already difficult context of rising demand for the injectable polio vaccine, we also have to deal with a situation in which stocks are low. Given the time required to produce each batch, these difficulties […] will take some time to resolve. We will keep you informed of the situation" (2 August 2000).

● "Regular provisions of DT Polio® vaccine are being planned, in order to re-establish a “safety stock” in wholesalers. This normalisation is underway" (31 July 2002).

● "We continue to dispatch regular information on the availability of our principal vaccines: – ROR Vax®: temporary supply difficulties; a shortage is likely during the second half of June. The situation should return to normal in July. – Tetravac-Acellulaire®: temporary supply difficulties; a shortage is likely during the second half of June. New batches of Tetravac-Acellulaire® are expected for July. – T Polio®: a lengthy supply interruption is likely. We are unable to say when regular supplies will return. – We are doing everything we can to resolve the current difficulties. They are transient, and the situation will return to normal shortly" (17 June 2003).

● "You will have noticed some supply difficulties with our DT Polio®, diphtheria, tetanus and inactivated polio vaccines in the last few weeks. Indeed, several batches that were to be available in September could not be released for technical reasons. It appears that we will not be able to provide supplies of DT Polio® vaccine before the second half of December 2003" (3 November 2003).

The French medicines agency recently approved the use of Revaxis® instead of DT Polio®.

1- Nau JY “Pasteur Méridien announce a pénurie temporaire de vaccins pour nourrissons” Le Monde 8 January 1998.
3- Prescrire Editorial Staff “Too many drug supply problems” Prescrire Int 2002; 11 (61): 159.