Tainted toothpaste shows up the U.S.

Spotlight on Rwanda

Although Rwandan children have not experienced the uptick in dental caries that those in developed nations now face, Rwanda’s scarcity of oral health professionals leaves much of the population at risk.

With less than 15 dentists in a nation of 8 million, Rwanda is facing an oral health crisis

Ravaged by HIV/AIDS, severe poverty and decades of armed conflict, the continent-wide crisis that afflicts sub-Saharan Africa is finally beginning to draw attention – and action – in the Western world.

While much of the globe stood silent during the 1990s, the nation of Rwanda, for example, was the scene of a vast, ghastly genocide that left as many as one million dead.

But today things appear to be changing. In the last four years the United States government pledged $15 billion to fight AIDS primarily in Africa and $1.2 billion to fight malaria in the 15 African countries hit hardest by the disease.

And Hollywood stars like George Clooney are using their celebrity status to encourage the American public to focus on the plight of millions of starving children on the continent.

The recall of toothpaste made in China—or elsewhere—that may be laced with diethylene glycol, a lethal thickening agent used in antifreeze, is widening and now includes toothpaste sold in the U.S.

The problem with toothpaste containing diethylene glycol was first uncovered in May when health officials in Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Australia, found the toxic industrial chemical in Excel and Mr. Cool, two brands of Chinese toothpaste.

The Dominican Republic removed 10,000 tubes of the toothpaste from store shelves. Panama also removed the toothpaste, and on May 50, police in Nicaragua seized 40,000 tubes while warning that another 50,000 tubes could still be on shelf. The toothpaste was imported from Costa Rica, which obtained it from Panama.

Earlier in May, dozens of people died in Panama after Taixing Glycine Factory in China shipped diethylene glycol as 99.5 percent glycerin for use in human medicine.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has found diethylene glycol in tubes of counterfeit Colgate sold in several dollar-type discount stores in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. In addition, an importer of Chinese toothpaste has issued a nationwide recall after FDA found diethylene glycol in legally imported Chinese toothpaste, and a Puerto Rican supermarket chain has also recalled toothpaste imported from China.

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