

Deaths point to drug misuse

WASHINGTON (AP) — Several asthma sufferers have died since a new drug hit the market in April, some apparently because they mistakingly believed the long-lasting drug would immediately relieve their breathing problems.

The deaths reported to the Food and Drug Administration were reported among users of Serevent. It is not yet clear how many are linked to misuse of the drug, but manufacturer Glaxo Inc. is warning patients and doctors to use it properly.

The drug is very effective at preventing asthma attacks and its effects last longer than other drugs,

experts agree.

It doesn't treat actual asthma attacks — because it takes at least 30 minutes to begin working. Doctors have reported 20 deaths since Serevent hit the market in April, and they believe many of the deaths were caused by patients inhaling the drug during an attack and waiting in vain for it to help.

"It's very, very important that people understand Serevent is not for acute asthma," Ramona Jones of manufacturer Glaxo Inc. said Wednesday. Instead, she said, "It's so important for people to have that short-acting bronchodilator in case they get in trouble."

Glaxo is warning doctors about the problems and last week began meeting with the Food and Drug Administration about strengthening Serevent's patient warning label.

The FDA emphasizes that it can't yet prove a connection with the 20 deaths. But improper Serevent use is suspected because many of the reports list asthma or "no drug effect" as the probable cause.

And Dr. Frank Finkelstein of Plymouth, Mass., describes two elderly women found dead while holding their Serevent.

Gore rallies support for vote on GATT

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fearing an embarrassing defeat, Vice President Al Gore and other senior administration officials worked feverishly Wednesday to shore up wavering Republican support for the GATT trade accord.

Their efforts came a day after Jesse Helms, chairman-to-be of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, hinted he would hinder the administration's foreign policy initiatives if President Clinton pressed ahead on the GATT vote, now scheduled for Dec. 1.

Shortly before Gore spoke, Newt Gingrich, the next House speaker and a supporter of the pact to slash world tariffs, said he was "very very concerned" about its prospects in the Senate.

Gore said at a news conference organized by businesses supporting the trade agreement, "The Congress will decide whether the United States will continue to lead the world in global economic issues or not. That's really what it comes down to."

Gore, White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta and Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen all said the pact, negotiated under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, must be

approved this year by the lame-duck Democratic Congress.

Gingrich, R-Ga., sent a letter to Clinton repeating his commitment to work toward "a bipartisan majority overwhelmingly approving" GATT in the House on Nov. 29.

The letter was also signed by the outgoing speaker, Rep. Thomas Foley, D-Wash., the outgoing majority leader, Rep. Dick Gephardt, D-Mo., and the outgoing minority leader, Rep. Bob Michel, R-Ill.

Republican Sen. Bob Dole, expected to be majority leader in the new Senate, has said he is predisposed to support GATT and would prefer to vote this year. But because legislation implementing the agreement cannot be amended, he is seeking administration support for separate legislation early next year.

That bill would strengthen the ability of the United States to withdraw from the accord if U.S. interests were harmed. It also would address a controversial deal that was struck with three communications companies to give them a discount on valuable licenses to develop the next generation of wireless telephone systems.

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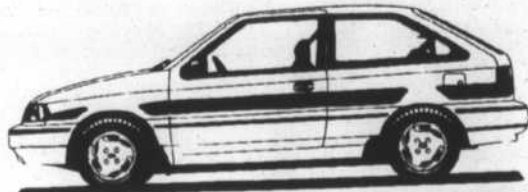
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