

**For immediate release
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'ENFORCE THE BAN ON DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER ADVERTISING,' SAYS HEALTH GROUP

This week, in a Canada-wide awareness campaign, DES Action Canada is calling on the Minister of Health, Ujjal Dosanjh, to enforce the ban on direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription drugs in Canada. Instead of drug advertising, Canadians need access to reliable drug information that is independent of the pharmaceutical industry, says the group.

During DES Awareness Week - June 20 to 26 - DES Action Canada reminds Canadians that the tragic lesson of DES exposure over 30 years ago has not been learned. In fact, since that time DTCA of prescription drugs has increased exponentially as have the harmful effects of so many other "wonder drugs."

Despite the fact that DTCA is banned in Canada, there's a lack of enforcement by Health Canada - a fact that has been publicly stated by the Standing Committee on Health in its report Opening the Medicine Cabinet in 2004. Canadians are also exposed to drug advertising from the United States where DTCA is legal.

"Systematic analyses of DTCA have found that the ads are often inaccurate, use emotive techniques and fail to provide the basic information patients need for informed treatment choice," says Dr. Barbara Mintzes, drug researcher and vice-president of DES Action Canada. "In New Zealand, which relies on a regulatory model similar to that being proposed for Canada - pre-screening plus industry self-regulation - DTCA contains almost no risk information and benefits are often exaggerated."

In both the United States and New Zealand, Vioxx (rofecoxib) was advertised to the public for four years after solid evidence of cardiac risks had emerged in a clinical trial (the VIGOR trial). "By stimulating sales, these ads led to greater population exposure and avoidable harm. They did not adequately warn the public of Vioxx's risks, and used images and headlines implying superior effectiveness when this was not the case," says Mintzes.

At a recent meeting of consumer health groups in Vancouver co-hosted by DES Action Canada, participants urged the federal government to heed recommendations of the Standing Committee on Health that Canada should not introduce DTCA and Health Canada should properly enforce the Food & Drugs Act. This includes reversing administrative policies that currently allow for certain ads to appear in Canada.

DES (diethylstilbestrol) was prescribed to an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 pregnant women across Canada between 1941 and 1971 in the mistaken belief that it prevented miscarriage. Marketed as a "wonder drug," DES remained on the market for 18 years after it was scientifically proven ineffective. The women prescribed DES and their offspring continue to suffer from adverse effects, decades after the initial exposure.

"Our members are acutely aware of the need for better post-market surveillance and the need to limit direct-to-consumer advertising," says president and co-founder Harriet Simand.

"Unfortunately, the legislative renewal process currently underway at Health Canada is heading in the opposite direction. Politicians must take leadership, and make sure that public health is a priority over commercial interests."

DES Awareness Week: June 20 to 26, 2005

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DES Action Canada is the only non-profit consumer organization alerting the Canadian public and health professionals to the risks associated with the drug diethylstilbestrol (DES). DES Action Canada's mission is to identify, inform, provide support to, and advocate for people exposed to DES. The organization also works to prevent similar public health disasters and supports efforts to strengthen health protection in areas such as prescription drug testing and approval, post-marketing surveillance and drug advertising. For more information, visit www.web.net/~desact