HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: Health authorities in Singapore have issued a public health warning to customers and medical professionals on imported mouthwash found to be contaminated with bacteria of the *Burkholderia cepacia* complex. Several unsold batches of Oral Guard Antiseptic-Antiplaque mouthwash, imported by Medimex Singapore Pte Ltd and distributed by IDS Pharmaceutical Division, were recalled after the country’s Health Sciences Authority (HSA) detected irregularities in three samples of the product during regular quality testing in November.

According to an HSA press release, the affected mouthwash is manufactured by Group Pharmaceuticals Limited, an Indian pharmaceutical company based in Mumbai, and labelled for use as an antiseptic aid for treating oral conditions such as inflammation of the gums, dental plaque, mouth ulcers or a sore throat. It is currently available in a limited number of retail stores and distributed to dental clinics, specialist institutions and general medical hospitals throughout the country.

Medimex has refused to provide the exact numbers of the recalled products, the newspaper Strait Times reports.

*Burkholderia cepacia*, a so-called gram-negative bacillus, is usually found in moist environments such as water or wet soil. It is considered harmless to healthy people but can pose health problems for people with weakened immune systems or chronic lung disease. *Burkholderia cepacia*-related infections often lead to a rapid decline in lung function and result in death.

The HSA has advised customers and health professionals nationwide to stop using the mouthwash until further notice and seek medical attention should they feel unwell after using the product.

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**Sex virus saves from oral cancer death**

Yvonne Bachmann

HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: Patients who suffer from certain types of head and neck cancer are more likely to survive following treatment if the tumor was caused by a papillomavirus (HPV), scientists from the University of Sydney in Australia report. According to their retrospective study published in the October issue of the *British Journal of Cancer*, patients with HPV positive tumours of tonsil and base of the tongue are four times less likely to die than patients whose cancers did not follow a HPV infection.

Furthermore, the cancer was three times less likely to recur at the primary site in patients with HPV positive cancers.

The scientists examined 198 Australians with advanced oropharyngeal cancer for an average of two years. The patients had received surgery or radiotherapy for the disease. Dr. Angela Hong, lead author from the University of Sydney, said: “The beneficial HPV effect was seen regardless of the type of treatment which would reduce the side effects of therapy.”

De Lesley Walker, director of information at Cancer Research UK, predicts beneficial effects on prospective treatments: “It’s possible that, in the future, patients with HPV positive cancers may be able to have less intensive forms of treatment which would reduce the side effects of therapy.”

“In addition to its role in cancer of the oropharynx, HPV causes most if not all cervical cancer and increases the risk of cancer of the vagina, penis and anus”, she adds.

HPV is spread through all types of close sexual contact, however, the use of condoms and vaccination reduces the risk of infection, expert say. Smoking and drinking alcohol are other factors to increase the chance of developing head and neck cancer.

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann, DTI)