

Nestle in trouble again for sponsoring research in 'violation' of breastfeeding law

Nestle denies allegations, says it is always in compliance with all laws & regulations including law that protects & promotes breastfeeding.

HIMANI CHANDNA Updated: 4 August, 2019 10:34 am IST



Nestle baby-food products at a store (Representative image) | Facebook: Firstcry.com Store

55
Shares

Text Size: [A-](#) [A+](#)

New Delhi: The Indian arm of Swiss food giant Nestle has come under the scanner for allegedly sponsoring research in five Indian hospitals in violation of a law that protects and promotes breastfeeding, six months after it was scrutinised for a similar transgression.

Following a complaint by NGO Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI), the Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has alerted the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the country's apex body to conduct medical research, to "examine the matter and take necessary actions".

Advertisement

In a letter dated 2 August, health secretary Preeti Sudan instructed ICMR director general Balram Bhargava to "ensure that all trials in future are screened for any infringement of IMS Act". ThePrint has seen a copy of the letter.

In India, the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods Act, also known as the IMS Act, prohibits direct and indirect sponsorship of health workers by product manufacturers.

It also bars financial inducements, pecuniary benefit, and funding of seminars, educational courses, contests, fellowships or research for health workers by companies manufacturing baby products listed under the IMS Act.

Nestle denied the allegations and said it is "always in compliance with all laws and regulations including IMS Act".

Also read: [Some plastic packaging for food is necessary to protect the environment](#)

Advertisement

The complaint

According to the complaint sent by BPNI, Nestle India Ltd is listed as the primary sponsor and source of monetary or material support to five hospitals conducting the research titled "Multicentric Observational Study to Observe Growth in Preterm hospitalized infants".

The leading manufacturer of infant milk substitutes and infant foods, including Lactogen and Nan, has been allegedly found to sponsor research in hospitals namely Cloudnine

Hospital, Bengaluru, Institute of Child Health, Kolkata, Manipal Hospital, Bengaluru, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital New Delhi, and Calcutta Medical Research Institute, Kolkata.

“On examining the ICMR Clinical Trial Registry maintained by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), BPNI confirmed that Nestle India Limited, a producer of infant milk substitutes and infant foods, is sponsoring research,” said the complaint sent by BPNI to the ministry.

ThePrint has seen the letter, which was sent to the government by BPNI in July.

No violation, says Nestle

Nestle said it had not violated the IMS Act.

“Clinical study for the purpose of scientific information is not prohibited under the IMS Act. The IMS Act does not discourage or prohibit dissemination of scientific information,” a Nestle spokesperson said in an email response to queries from ThePrint.

“A mere reading of Section 9 will clearly show that the Act prohibits financial inducement to health workers or any contribution or pecuniary benefit including funding of seminar, conference etc., only if these are for the purpose of promoting the use of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant foods.

“The objective of the clinical study under reference is to encourage science-based research. This study is an institution-based study, all Institutional Ethics Committee approvals have been obtained from the participating sites,” the spokesperson said.

“The letter from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has requested Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to examine the matter. Nestlé India will provide all its support on this issue to ICMR and we are confident of our position.”

Previous incidents

Earlier in January, the company was under the lens of the same ministry for violating the same law, the IMS Act, over allegations of influencing doctors to recommend its baby products, including infant milk powder, to parents.

Then, BPNI **expressed doubts** about a “scientific programme” organised by Nestle Nutrition Institute (NNI) for doctors on 24 October 2018 in Maharashtra’s Dhule. The NNI had denied the allegations.

Last November, the company had to cancel a “scientific meet on baby food” after two paediatricians invited as speakers **declined to participate** following BPNI’s complaint to the Delhi unit of the Indian Academy of Paediatrics.

Advertisement

Also read: [India among top 6 countries with the largest childhood cancer burden: Lancet study](#)

Get the *PrintEssential* to make sense of the day’s key developments

55
Shares

SHARE YOUR VIEWS

NEXT STORY