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# Contamination Suspected in Hepatitis C Outbreak at Russian Children's Hospital

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Authorities are investigating a hepatitis C outbreak at a children's hospital in Russia's Far East due to what local officials suspect was the reuse of medical gloves and catheters.

At least 26 children — some as young as six months — who had at one point undergone treatment at the same cancer ward have been diagnosed with hepatitis C in the past year. Investigators opened a criminal case into hygiene violations at the children's hospital in the city of Blagoveshchensk, a charge that carries a maximum of one year in jail.

"A preliminary inspection indicates that disposable gloves were used many times," Amur region governor Vasily Orlov told the Govorit Moskva radio station Wednesday. "Catheters and catheter plugs were also used several times, which is unacceptable."

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Local legislative assembly deputy Sergei Trush told state-run RIA Novosti news agency the infected children had either submitted blood samples for analysis or had blood transfusions at the hospital's hematology ward. On Thursday, Trush said he continued fielding calls from parents whose children had been infected there as far back as 2012.

The criminal probe is working to establish causality between the children's stay in the hospital and the hepatitis C outbreak, Interfax quoted regional Investigative Committee spokesman Alexei Lubinsky as saying.

An estimated 71 million people worldwide suffer chronically from hepatitis C, a liver disease caused by a blood-borne virus. Most cases can be cured with antiviral medicine, but many do not initially show symptoms. If left untreated the virus can cause cirrhosis or liver cancer.

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In Russia, antiviral medicine is administered strictly from age 18.

"We're not talking about deliberate contamination," the Kommersant daily quoted Trush as saying Wednesday. "But in my opinion, there is an underreporting of what's going on."

*Reuters contributed reporting to this article.*

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