

Pfizer: Nigeria drug trial victims get compensation

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Pfizer has agreed to sponsor health projects in Kano

US-based pharmaceutical giant Pfizer has made the first compensation payment to Nigerian families affected by a controversial drug trial 15 years ago.

It paid \$175,000 (£108,000) each to four families in the first of a series of payments it is expected to make.

The payouts are part of an out-of-court settlement reached in 2009.

In 1996, 11 children died and dozens were left disabled after Pfizer gave them the experimental anti-meningitis drug, Trovan.

The payouts were made to the parents of four of the children who died.

Their parents told the BBC they welcomed the payment, but it would not replace the loss of their loved ones.

The children were part of a group of 200 given the drug during a meningitis epidemic in the northern city of Kano as part of a medical trial comparing Trovan's effectiveness with the established treatment.

For years Pfizer maintained that meningitis - not the drug - caused the deaths and disabilities.

But after a lengthy and expensive litigation process, it reached a settlement with the Kano government in northern Nigeria.

DNA tests

The trials were carried out in Kano and the state government fought Pfizer on behalf of victims and their families.



Hajara, photographed in 2007, survived the trials but became deaf afterwards and is unable to speak

It has taken two years and DNA tests to establish who is entitled to payments, the BBC's Jonah Fisher in Lagos says.

It could take another year for payments to be concluded, he says.

Pfizer also agreed to sponsor health projects in Kano as well as creating a fund of \$35m to compensate those affected.

Pfizer said it was pleased the four had been compensated.

"This is the first step in a multi-phase review process by which the independent board of trustees that manages the fund will deliver payment to all other qualified claimants," the company said in a statement.

"We thank them for their commitment and dedication to seeing this process through in the most timely and transparent way possible."

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