

FDA decision on Plan B for minors called contrary to common sense

WASHINGTON - The Food and Drug Administration's decision not to appeal a court decision that the morning-after pill marketed as Plan B should be available over the counter to minors "flies in the face of common sense," said the U.S. bishops' pro-life spokeswoman.

"Wider access to Plan B could endanger the lives of newly conceived children, and will put minors at risk for unnecessary side effects, undermine parental rights and contribute to higher" rates of sexually transmitted diseases, said Deirdre McQuade, assistant director for policy and communications at the bishops' Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, in an April 23 statement.

The FDA announced April 22 that the Obama administration would not appeal a March 23 decision by U.S. District Judge Edward Korman making Plan B available to 17-year-olds without a prescription. A prescription had previously been required for anyone under 18.

Korman, a judge in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York, said the FDA had "repeatedly and unreasonably" delayed a decision on whether Plan B should be available over the counter and had been swayed by politics in ultimately deciding to make the drug available without a prescription only to those 18 or over.

McQuade noted that Plan B, known generically as levonorgestrel, "is 40 times more potent than comparable progestin-only birth control pills (Ovrette) for which a prescription is required."

"Pregnancy is not a disease and fertility is not a pathological condition, so Plan B has no authentic therapeutic purpose, and can actually cause harm to women and their newly conceived children," she added.

By receiving the drug without the supervision of a doctor, many teens will not be aware of the risks associated with Plan B and its possible abortifacient effect, McQuade said.

“Although Plan B can prevent fertilization, the manufacturer admits it may also prevent an embryo from implanting in the womb, which is essential to his or her continued survival,” she said.

“Since it takes several days for the growing embryo to reach the uterine lining and implant in the mother’s womb, the child in his or her second week of life could die as a direct result of Plan B,” she said. “This is properly understood as an early abortion.”

McQuade also said studies in Europe and the U.S. have shown that “increased access to emergency contraception has failed to reduce rates of unintended pregnancy and abortion,” despite proponents’ predictions to the contrary.

Instead, the increased access “has led to greater sexual risk-taking among adolescent populations, in turn leading to high rates of sexually transmitted disease,” she said.