

US mulls easier access to emergency contraception

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US regulators are considering whether to grant a drug company's request to make emergency contraception available over the counter to people of all ages instead of by prescription.

Currently, the morning-after pill -- which can reduce the chance of pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of [unprotected sex](#) -- is available by prescription only to people under 17 in the United States.

Those over 17 can ask for it at a pharmacy counter without a doctor's prescription.

Teva Pharmaceuticals asked the [Food and Drug Administration](#) to change its rules to allow its product, Plan B One-Step, to be easily accessible to all ages, and industry watchers expect a decision on Wednesday.

"We believe that this defies good public health sense," said spokeswoman Jeanne Monahan of the Family Research Council, a conservative advocacy group, citing STDs and sexual abuse as possible risks that may be ignored if youths can get the morning-after pill without consulting a doctor.

"Of course we are pro-life and of course that is a major issue on this, but we believe there is a real danger that Plan B can be given to girls and sexually abused and exploited minors under coercion and without their consent," she told AFP.

"The doctor can ask good questions to get to if there is a problem of [sexual exploitation](#). To remove that level of [medical supervision](#) to me is removing a huge help to young girls."

Pro-choice advocates have long pressed for greater access to [emergency contraception](#), and voiced hope that the FDA would loosen regulations.

"Hopefully, it will be right on the shelves between the condoms and the pregnancy tests," Kirsten Moore of the Reproductive Health Technologies Project, an [advocacy group](#), was quoted as telling the Washington Post.

"We think it's good news for women's health and long overdue."

An FDA spokeswoman declined to give any details about the impending decision.

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