

Philippines' Catholic medics urged not to issue birth control

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The Catholic Church in the Philippines is encouraging members who are medical workers to refuse to implement a newly-approved birth control law, an official said Thursday.

It is the latest move by the powerful church hierarchy in the largely Catholic Philippines against a law that took effect this year, compelling the state for the first time to provide free condoms and contraceptive pills.

"Pastoral guidance" issued by bishops this week explains how government health workers can legally refuse to dish out contraceptives on ethical or religious grounds, Marvin Mejia, executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, told AFP.

"Obviously, Catholics should not, on moral grounds, seek employment in the very government agencies that promote artificial contraception," reads the guidance, obtained by AFP.

"But if circumstances compelled them to be employed in such agencies... said Catholics should be aware that they cannot be forced to promote, distribute or dispense artificial contraceptives against their religious or moral conviction."

The Church is an influential force in the Philippines, which counts around 80 percent of its 100 million-strong population as Catholics. Abortion and divorce remain banned in the nation.

The deeply controversial [birth control](#) law was finally approved by the Supreme Court in April, ending a 15-year campaign by the Church to stop state-sanctioned family planning coming into force. It also mandates that sex education be taught in schools.

However, the law allows for moral or religious objections.

Conscientious objectors are required to immediately refer patients to another service willing to supply information or birth control, but the [church](#) disputes this.

Father Mejia said bishops are set to organise seminars in their dioceses to inform government health workers of the law's provisions.

"The Church recognises that it is already a [law](#)... but it's very important for people to know their rights," Mejia added.

There was no immediate comment from the health ministry.

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