

Frances Kelsey, doctor who opposed thalidomide, dies at 101

9 August 2015



This Oct. 16, 1962, file photo shows Dr. Frances O. Kelsey, of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, examining scales, in Washington, D.C. Kelsey, a Canadian doctor known for her tenacity in keeping a dangerous drug given to pregnant women off the U.S. market, has died at age 101. She died Friday, Aug. 7, 2015, less than 24 hours after receiving the Order of Canada in a private ceremony at her daughter's home in London, Ontario. (AP Photo/File)

Frances Kelsey, a Canadian doctor known for her tenacity in keeping a dangerous drug given to pregnant women off the U.S. market, has died at age 101.

She died Friday morning, less than 24 hours after receiving the Order of Canada in a private ceremony at her daughter's home in London, Ontario.

Kelsey was a medical officer for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in the early 1960s when she

raised concerns about [thalidomide](#), a drug that was being used in other countries to treat morning sickness and insomnia in [pregnant women](#).

Despite pressure from the makers of thalidomide to approve the drug, she refused, and as a result, thousands of children were saved from crippling birth defects.

After the sedative was prescribed beginning in 1950, thousands of children whose mothers took the drug were born with abnormally short limbs and in some cases without any arms, legs or hips. The [birth defects](#) were reported in Europe, Australia, Canada and Japan.

On Thursday, Kelsey received the insignia of Member of the Order of Canada to Kelsey.

Kelsey's daughter, Christine Kelsey, said the ceremony had originally been scheduled for September but was held earlier because her mother's health was deteriorating.

Thalidomide lawsuits have been filed across the world over the years.

In 2010, the British government officially apologized to people hurt by the drug, after earlier agreeing to pay 20 million pounds (\$31 million) to Thalidomide's victims. In 2013, a class action suit by Australian and New Zealand victims of Thalidomide against the drug's British distributor Diageo Scotland Ltd. was settled for 89 million Australian dollars (\$81 million).



This Aug. 1, 1962, file photo shows Dr. Frances O. Kelsey of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, who is credited with keeping the birth-deforming drug, Thalidomide, off the U.S. market. Kelsey, a Canadian doctor known for her tenacity in keeping a dangerous drug given to pregnant women off the U.S. market, has died at age 101. She died Friday, Aug. 7, 2015, less than 24 hours after receiving the Order of Canada in a private ceremony at her daughter's home in London, Ontario. (AP Photo/File)

Some victims have won compensation cases against drug producer Gruenenthal Group's distributors, but the German company has long refused to agree to settlements. It officially apologized to victims in 2012.

The [drug](#) is now being researched as a possible treatment for certain kinds of cancer.

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