

Women protest FDA delay in morning-after pill's nonprescription sale

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NEW YORK -- Last week's action by federal regulators to postpone deciding whether morning-after birth control pills can be sold over the counter prevents women from controlling their bodies, said feminists who passed out the pills at a sidewalk protest Tuesday.

"We are here to tell the (Food and Drug Administration) that if they won't put the morning-after pill over the counter we are going to protest the prescription requirement by handing out the morning-after pill to women that want it," said Annie Tummino, the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit filed in federal court in Brooklyn in January demanding that the pill be made available without a prescription.

The Food and Drug Administration on Friday again postponed its long-awaited decision on whether to allow the morning-after pill to be sold over the counter. It said it still hadn't determined how to ensure that only females 17 or older can use it without a doctor's guidance.

The FDA said scientific evidence backed the safe nonprescription use of the pill, sold under the brand Plan B, by females 17 or older. But it called for 60 days of public comment on whether and how drugstores could enforce an age limit.

Women at Tuesday's protest in front of the federal building in Manhattan said younger teenagers should have access to the pill.

"Age should not be a factor that determines how much control you have over your body," said Cecilia Traini, an organizer with the Women's Liberation Birth Control Project. "If you're old enough to be pregnant you're old enough to decide not to be pregnant."

Traini said she used the pill recently thanks to a roommate who had a prescription.

"That's how I got it, illegally from a friend," she said. "Because of luck I am not pregnant today."

The morning-after pill is a high dose of regular birth control that, taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex, can lower the risk of pregnancy by up to 89 percent.

Laws in seven states-- Alaska, California, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Washington --already allow women and girls to buy Plan B without a prescription, with no age restrictions. Massachusetts could become the eighth this fall, as lawmakers are expected to override their governor's veto of nonprescription sales.

Women at Tuesday's demonstration handed out several packets containing the pill and said doing so constituted civil disobedience. Police officers stationed nearby made no move to arrest them.

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