

American Academy
of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



SAHM
SOCIETY FOR ADOLESCENT
HEALTH AND MEDICINE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 7, 2011

CONTACT: Erin Wallace, 202-724-3309, ewallace@aap.org

Medical Groups Denounce HHS Decision on Access to Emergency Contraception
Move Defies Strong Evidence that Emergency Contraception is a Safe, Effective Tool to Prevent Unintended Pregnancy

Washington, DC—The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (The College) and the Society of Adolescent Health and Medicine (SAHM) denounce the decision today by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to overrule an evidence-based decision by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to approve an application for over-the-counter access without age restriction to the emergency contraception (EC) product Plan B One-Step. This move defies the strong data that EC is safe and effective for all females of reproductive age.

“As advocates for the health and well-being of all young people, the AAP recommends that adolescents postpone sexual activity until they are fully ready for the emotional, physical, and financial consequences of sex,” said Robert Block, MD, FAAP, AAP president. “However, as physicians who care for our nation’s children, it is our responsibility to protect the health of our teenage patients, and an unintended pregnancy can have significant implications for adolescents’ physical and emotional health.”

“The decision to continue restricting access to this safe and effective product is medically inexplicable,” continued Dr. Block. “The AAP strongly encourages the use of contraception—including EC—by adolescents who choose sexual activity, and recommends that teens receive appropriate counseling on EC use by a pediatrician or other primary care physician.”

“Today’s decision by HHS is a profound disappointment for the health of adolescent girls and is inconsistent with what we know about the safety and benefits of emergency contraception,” said Leslie Walker, MD, president of SAHM. “Emergency contraception is a safe, effective back-up birth control method for teens and women of all ages to prevent unintended pregnancy.”

Although there are approximately 3.1 million unintended pregnancies each year in this country, progress is being made in lowering pregnancy rates among teenagers. A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that adolescent pregnancy rates hit a record low in 2010, with the numbers declining over the last three years. While this reflects the lowest rate ever recorded in nearly seven decades of collecting data, the U.S. rate is still higher than that of several developed countries.

“Today’s disappointing decision by HHS counters advancements in public health and welfare by minimizing young women’s ability to safely and responsibly control and protect their reproductive health,” said James N. Martin, Jr., MD, president of The College. “The College will continue to push for removing the unnecessary age restriction for over-the-counter access to emergency contraception.”

EC use can reduce the risk of pregnancy up to 120 hours after unprotected intercourse or contraceptive failure, and is most effective if used in the first 24 hours. Today’s decision means that teens under age 17 will still need to obtain a prescription from a healthcare provider to access all forms of EC.

The AAP and SAHM recommend that adolescents be counseled on EC in the context of a discussion on sexual safety and family planning, regardless of current intentions for sexual behavior. All contraceptive counseling for adolescents should include information on the use and availability of EC wherever these visits occur, including emergency departments, clinics and hospitals.

For more information on AAP recommendations on contraception and emergency contraception use among teens please visit www.healthychildren.org/EC

####

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (The College), a 501(c)(3) organization, is the nation’s leading group of physicians providing health care for women. As a private, voluntary, nonprofit membership organization of approximately 55,000 members, The College strongly advocates for quality health care for women, maintains the highest standards of clinical practice and continuing education of its members, promotes patient education, and increases awareness among its members and the public of the changing issues facing women’s health care. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), a 501(c)(6) organization, is its companion organization.

Founded in 1968, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine is a multidisciplinary organization committed to improving the physical and psychosocial health and well-being of all adolescents through advocacy, clinical care, health promotion, health service delivery, professional development and research.