

# **The “Morning-After” Pill: A Risk to Adolescents**

*American College of Pediatricians – December 2012*

The American College of Pediatricians strongly opposes adolescents’ over-the-counter (OTC) access to the “morning-after” pill (MAP), a form of emergency contraception. Such ease of access to this drug may increase **unprotected** sexual activity among teens and increase the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI). MAP use can cause significant adverse effects such as heavy menstrual bleeding, irregular menstruation, and pelvic pain. It also interacts with a wide variety of drugs, a fact unlikely to be known by unsupervised users.<sup>1,2</sup> Under physician supervision, these effects are better managed, including the potentially dangerous possibility of MAP use with ectopic pregnancy. The long-term risk of breast and cervical cancer with the use or overuse of this high-dose synthetic hormone (up to 15 times that of oral contraceptives), is largely unknown. Lower-dose oral contraceptives are available only by prescription; the MAP deserves at least the same physician oversight.

Furthermore, while the MAP is chemically different from the “abortion pill” (RU-486) and does not abort an embryo already implanted in the uterus, it can act as an abortifacient since it “may also prevent...attachment of a fertilized egg to the uterus (implantation).”<sup>3,4</sup> Therefore, it may terminate the life of a child.

Society has long recognized that adolescents possess immature reasoning skills. This is why adolescents are not allowed to buy tobacco or alcohol products, to vote, or to consent to most medical procedures. Research has now documented that important decision-making areas of the human brain are not fully developed until the mid-twenties.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup> Consequently, the College is concerned that adolescents may carelessly use the MAP as a routine form of birth-control at a time in their lives when they are less capable of dealing with the subsequent negative consequences. In a recent report<sup>9</sup> that described adolescent attitudes regarding Plan B (one form of the MAP), the authors stated that, “Some (interviewed) participants felt that having more access to emergency contraception (EC) would cause teens to act promiscuously and irresponsibly...” and “Participants also acknowledged that over-the-counter availability might increase misuse of EC, with some youth taking EC without fully understanding the directions and the potential side effects.”

For the well-being of adolescents and the protection of human life, the College urges HHS, the FDA, Congress, and other policy makers to enact policy to restrict the over-the-counter sale of MAP.

**The Board of Directors Comment: This statement should in no way be interpreted as an endorsement by the American College of Pediatricians of the “morning-after” pill.**

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*The American College of Pediatricians is a national medical association of licensed physicians and healthcare professionals who specialize in the care of infants, children, and adolescents. The mission of the College is to enable all children to reach their optimal, physical and emotional health and well-being. More information is available at [www.Best4Children.org](http://www.Best4Children.org).*

## REFERENCES

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