

# EAST BAY DAILY NEWS

## Local Group Campaigns for 'Plan B'

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Staff Writer

Imagine it's a Saturday night and the condom broke. Your doctor isn't available. And you don't want to get pregnant.

In California, a woman can go straight to the pharmacy to get emergency contraception, in the form of a medication known as Plan B. In Alameda County, dozens of pharmacies have pharmacists on staff who can prescribe the so-called "morning-after pill" that prevents pregnancies. However, the FDA has not made the drug available over the counter nationwide.

That means that in just seven states in addition to California — Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Washington and Massachusetts — women can buy the emergency birth control without a prescription.

Tuesday marked Back Up Your Birth Control Day in an effort to raise awareness of the issue that remains a hot political matter.

"The FDA continues to ignore good science and medicine — Plan B is safe, effective and helps to prevent unintended pregnancy. On Back Up Your Birth Control Day, women's health advocates will focus on the science to highlight what we have promoted from Day 1: put women's health above political ideology," said Belle Taylor-McGhee, executive director of Oakland-based Pharmacy Access Partnership.

Plan B is not to be confused with RU-486, known as the abortion pill. Plan B won't work if a woman is already pregnant. Instead, for up to five days, Plan B works by preventing the release or fertilization of an egg. It can also stop it from attaching to the womb.

The newly nominated FDA chief, Andrew von Eschenbach, ran into trouble last week over the agency's stance on the emergency contraception.

Two Democratic senators, Hillary Clinton of New York and Patty Murray of Washington, vowed to place a hold on the Bush nominee until the FDA takes a position on permitting Plan B to be sold over the counter.

"We were rudely surprised when the FDA announced it would further study the decision, so we are putting everybody on notice that we will be placing a hold on this nomination and will not lift it until we have a decision," Clinton said.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report. If you want to comment on this news story, please send a letter to the editor to [letters@ebdailynews.com](mailto:letters@ebdailynews.com).*