



For Immediate Release
August 24, 2006

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PLAN B OTC ACCESS A LONG OVERDUE VICTORY – FOR SOME WOMEN
Teen Prescription Requirement is Shortsighted; EC Pharmacy Access More Critical than Ever

Statement by Belle Taylor-McGhee, Executive Director, Pharmacy Access Partnership

Oakland, CA – The Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) long-awaited decision to make Plan B emergency contraception (EC) an over-the-counter (OTC) product represents a major public health victory for women in preventing unintended pregnancy and in reducing the need for abortion.

While this change will result in easier access for women 18 and older who can soon obtain EC without a prescription, the FDA prescription requirement for women under 18 is both short-sighted and ill-advised. Limiting access to EC puts young women’s health at risk and forces pharmacists to serve as watchdogs in the distribution of a product that volumes of scientific data confirm poses no health risks to women of any age.

However, in California and in eight other states where EC pharmacy access is available (WA, AK, HI, NM, ME, MA, NH, VT), a specially trained pharmacist can initiate a Plan B prescription without requiring an advance prescription from a doctor or clinic. Pharmacy access to EC serves as an essential model of EC provision regardless of the woman’s age. It is also consistent with recommendations for EC access without age restrictions from several major medical associations, such as the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Pharmacy Access Partnership has been at the forefront of promoting access to Plan B and providing essential training and educational materials for pharmacists and pharmacy staff. We will continue to address access barriers facing the young women the FDA left behind. We stand committed with the myriad of women’s health advocates across the country who promote broader access to Plan B for underserved populations, particularly young women, low-income and undocumented women.

During the transition period from a prescription-only to an OTC product, we strongly recommend that women of all ages obtain advance prescriptions for Plan B to avoid facing unnecessary delays in obtaining the product when they need it most. Plan B is most effective the sooner it is taken after unprotected sex but can be taken after up to 5 days.

Editor’s Note: Pharmacy Access Partnership will provide online Plan B OTC Fact Sheets for consumers, pharmacies, pharmacists and pharmacy staff. For more information, please visit our websites: www.PharmacyAccess.org, www.Go2EC.org and www.EC-Help.org.

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Pharmacy Access Partnership was established in 1999 as a center of the independent, nonprofit Public Health Institute. Its purpose is to expand consumer access to contraceptive commodities and reproductive health services in pharmacies, and to give pharmacies a stronger role in promoting community health.