DAILY MAIL (London)

January 31, 2011 Monday

**FREE** **MORNING-AFTER PILL FAILS TO CUT UNDERAGE PREGNANCIES**  
  
**BYLINE:** BY DAVID DERBYSHIRE  
  
**LENGTH:** 697 words

THE drive to give free morning-after pills to teenage girls has failed to cut underage pregnancies.

Schemes to offer over-the-counter emergency birth control to girls under 16 have simply encouraged youngsters to have more unprotected sex, damning research found.

In doing so they have fuelled a rise in sexually transmitted diseases.

The findings are a blow to public health chiefs who have argued that handing out the morning-after pill cuts schoolgirl pregnancies.

Family campaigners seized on the research as more evidence that the problem of teenage pregnancies needs a 'moral solution' and not one based on dishing out drugs.

Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe.

In 2008, the last year for which figures are available, more than 7,500 girls in England and Wales became pregnant.

The scheme to give free emergency contraception to teenagers Z including girls under 16 Z in pharmacies was a key part of the last government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.

But the research from Nottingham University's business school shows the policy has failed.

Economists Professor David Paton and Professor Sourafel Girma compared pregnancy rates and levels of sexually transmitted infections in more than 140 local authorities across England between 1998 and 2004.

Some of the authorities did not offer free over-the-counter morning after pills to teenagers, while others introduced the scheme part way through the study period.

Pregnancy rates among girls under-16 were the same whether or not they had access to free morning after pills from chemists, the researchers found.

However, the rates of sexually transmitted disease were significantly higher in areas taking part in the scheme.

The same findings were true for girls aged 16 to 18.

Professor Paton said: 'Offering the morning-after pill free of charge didn't have the intended effect of cutting teenage pregnancies, but did have the unfortunate side effect of increasing sexually transmitted infections.

'Almost certainly young people are having more unprotected sex.'

The findings have serious implications for health chiefs.

'If these schemes which local authorities are spending money on are not having a good effect, but having a negative unintended consequence, the implication is that this money should be spent elsewhere,' he said.

The study, which is due to be published by the Journal of Health Economics, took into account lifestyle factors that might influence disease and pregnancy rates in different parts of England.

It found that sexually transmitted infections increased by 12 per cent among the under 16s where the morning-after pill was available free from chemists.

Tory MP Julian Brazier said: 'This is just more evidence that Labour's health establishment trying to find purely mechanical solutions to problems which need moral solutions.

The fact Britain leads the developing world in children born to young unmarried mothers is a moral problem, and not a chemical one.'

Norman Wells, of the Family Education Trust, said: 'International research has consistently failed to find any evidence that emergency birth control schemes achieve a reduction in teenage conception an abortion rates.

'But now we have evidence showing that not only are such schemes failing to do any good, they may in fact be doing harm.'

Rates of sexually transmitted disease are soaring in the UK.

In 2009 there were nearly half a million new cases.

The number of people with chlamydia has trebled since 1998.

Labour's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was supposed to halve under-18 pregnancy rates in England by 2010

. But despite costing 6246 million, it came nowhere near the target.

A Department of Health spokesman said: 'We have one of the worst teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates in Western Europe.

'We need a bold new approach to tackling these issues because so many of the lifestyle driven health problems are already at alarming levels.

'That is why the Government wasted no time in publishing a strategy for public health.

It sets out our plans to ring-fence public health spending, devolve power and budgets to local communities and work across areas from housing to education to improve public health.'

The Daily Telegraph (London)

January 31, 2011 Monday   
Edition 2;   
National Edition

**Morning-after pill project increases sexual diseases**  
**BYLINE:** Victoria Ward  
  
**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 2  
  
**LENGTH:** 310 words

A GOVERNMENT scheme to give teenagers the morning-after pill free of charge at pharmacies in an attempt to cut down on unwanted pregnancies has led to a rise in sexually transmitted diseases, research has shown.

A study has found that the policy encouraged young people to have unprotected sex and failed to reduce the number of under-age pregnancies.

Professors Sourafel Girma and David Paton of Nottingham University compared areas of England where the scheme was introduced with areas where it was not implemented.

They found that pregnancy rates for girls aged under 16 remained the same, while the rates of sexually transmitted diseases increased by 12 per cent in those areas where the pill was available free from chemists.

Prof Paton said: "We find that offering the morning-after pill free of charge didn't have the intended effect of cutting teenage pregnancies but did have the unfortunate side effect of increasing sexually transmitted infections.

"By focusing on sexually transmitted infections it allows us to test whether there is an impact on sexual risk-taking, and that seems to be the implication."

The report, The Impact of Emergency Birth Control on Teen Pregnancy and STIs, will be published in the Journal of Health Economics.

The Government is expected to overhaul it teenage pregnancy strategy.

Teenage pregnancy rates in Britain are the highest in western Europe and the number of sexual diseases diagnosed in under 16s has risen by 58 per cent in five years, with chlamydia now most common.

Norman Wells, director of the Family Education Trust, said: "International research has consistently failed to find any evidence that emergency birth control schemes achieve a reduction in teenage conception and abortion rates.

"But now we have evidence showing that not only are such schemes failing to do any good, but they may in fact be doing harm."

The Sunday Times (London)

January 30, 2011 Sunday   
Edition 1;   
Scotland

**Pill handout causes rise in teen sex disease**  
**BYLINE:** Sarah-Kate Templeton  
  
**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 6  
  
**LENGTH:** 435 words

AN official scheme to give the morning-after pill free to teenagers at chemists has backfired by increasing the rates of sexually transmitted diseases and failing to reduce the number of under-age pregnancies.

New research shows the Department of Health's policy of handing out emergency contraception to under-16s encourages them to indulge in riskier sex lives.

Offering the morning-after pill to adolescents has been a major part of governments' teenage pregnancy strategy over the past 10 years.

The policy was intended to cut record levels of schoolgirls having babies by giving them medication, taken up to three days after unprotected sex, to end the pregnancy.

The government now intends to overhaul its whole approach to teenage pregnancy.

The new study, by professors Sourafel Girma and David Paton, of Nottingham University, compared areas of England where the scheme was introduced with others that either declined to provide the morning-after pill free from pharmacies or did so at a later date.

The academics found the rates of pregnancy among girls under 16 remained the same, but the rates of sexually transmitted infections increased.

Paton said: "We find that offering the morning-after pill free of charge didn't have the intended effect of cutting teenage pregnancies but did have the unfortunate side effect of increasing sexually transmitted infections.

"By focusing on sexually transmitted infections, it allows us to test whether there is an impact on sexual risk-taking, and that seems to be the implication."

The report, to be published in the Journal of Health Economics, found that sexually transmitted infections increased by 12% among the under-16s where the morning-after pill was available free from chemists.

Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in western Europe.

In 2008, the latest year for which figures are available, more than 7,500 girls in England and Wales became pregnant.

Nearly two thirds of these pregnancies ended in abortion.

Rates of sexually transmitted diseases are rising in Britain.

In 2009 there were 12,000 more cases than the previous year, when 470,701 cases were reported.

The number of infections in 16- to 19 year-olds seen at genito-urinary medicine clinics rose from 46,856 in 2003 to 58,133 in 2007.

Norman Wells, director of the Family Eduction Trust, said: "International research has consistently failed to find any evidence that emergency birth control schemes achieve a reduction in teenage conception and abortion rates.

But now we have evidence showing that not only are such schemes failing to do any good, but they may in fact be doing harm."