

'Morning after pill' approved

Bloomberg

The health ministry approved Japan's first emergency contraceptive more than a decade after the so-called morning after drug debuted in Europe.

NorLevo will be sold in Japan beginning in May after it was approved by the ministry, the pill's maker, Sosei Group Corp., said Wednesday.

The drug, used to prevent unwanted pregnancy, will be marketed by Aska Pharmaceutical Co., Sosei said. Its active ingredient, levonorgestrel, is listed as an essential medicine by the World Health Organization, the drugmaker said.

Access to the tablet may help reduce the abortion rate.

Fifteen percent of women in Japan have had an abortion, and a quarter of those have had at least two, according to a government-funded study led by Yuji Taketani, a director at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Medicine.

Sosei sought approval to sell its levonorgestrel tablet in Japan in September 2009. The product, taken within 72 hours after unprotected sexual intercourse or contraceptive failure, has been approved in about 50 countries, Sosei said.

In Japan, 8.8 women per 1,000 had an abortion in 2008, health ministry statistics show. That's fewer than the 16.1 per 1,000 among women between the ages of 15 years and 44 years in the U.S. in 2006, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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