

October 18, 2007

Birth Control Allowed for Maine Middle Schoolers

By JOEL ELLIOTT

PORTLAND, Me., Oct. 17 — The Portland school board on Wednesday approved a measure allowing middle-school students to gain access to prescription [birth control](#) medications without notifying parents.

The proposal, from the Portland Division of Public Health, calls for the independently operated health care center at King Middle School to provide a variety of services to students, including immunizations and physical checkups in addition to birth-control medications and counseling for [sexually transmitted diseases](#), said Lisa Belanger, an administrator for Portland's student health centers.

All but two members of the 12-person committee voted to approve the plan.

The school principal, Mike McCarthy, said about 5 of the school's 500 students had identified themselves as being sexually active.

Health care professionals at the clinic advised the committee that the proposal was necessary in order for the clinic to serve students who were engaging in risky behavior.

The conference room at the Wednesday night meeting was packed with parents, students and television cameras as school board committee members discussed the issue and heard testimony from experts and residents.

"It has been shown, over and over again, that this does not increase sexual activity," said Pat Patterson, the medical director of School-Based Health Centers.

Reaction was mixed.

"This is really a violation of parents' rights," Peter Doyle, a Portland resident, told the committee. "If there were a constitutional challenge, you guys would be at risk of a lawsuit."

Others argued for approval.

"Not every child is getting the guidance needed to keep them safe," said Richard Veilleux, who said his child attends King Middle School. "This is about giving kids who are sexually active the tools that they need."

According to the National Assembly on School-Based Health Care, about 30 percent of the 1,700 school-based health centers in the United States provide birth control to students, Dr. Patterson said.

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