

Court to weigh bid to ban abortion pill in US

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A Texas courtroom will be the latest battleground in the national fight over abortion rights when a judge hears arguments Wednesday over the legality of a widely-used abortion pill.

Galvanized after the US Supreme Court ended the nationwide right to abortion last June, anti-abortion forces have since targeted the federally-approved drug mifepristone in their effort to win a total ban on the practice.

US District Court Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk announced Monday the hearing in Amarillo, Texas on a lawsuit alleging the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should never have approved the "dangerous" prescription pill in 2000.

One component of a two-drug regimen used for medication abortion, mifepristone has been used by an estimated 5.6 million women to terminate pregnancies since its approval, according to the FDA.

It can be used in the United States up to 10 weeks of pregnancy.

The pro-abortion rights Guttmacher Institute estimates that more than half of all abortions involve the use of the drug.

But the Alliance Defending Freedom, a Christian advocacy group, sued the FDA saying the approval of mifepristone "disavow(ed)" science, "ignored" potential health impacts and "disregarded" the complications that can arise with its use.

"The FDA failed America's women and girls when it chose politics over science and approved chemical abortion drugs for use in the United States," they said.

With abortion opponents now focused on curtailing access to mifepristone, the treatment has already been halted in some 15 states which have banned all abortion since the 2022 Supreme Court decision.

The Texas suit seeks to block it nationally by overturning the FDA's

approval of the drug.

The FDA has urged the judge to reject the request.

"The public interest would be dramatically harmed by effectively withdrawing from the marketplace a safe and effective drug that has lawfully been on the market for 22 years," it said.

—Conservative Christian—

Judge Kacsmaryk was targeted by the plaintiffs to hear the case due to his deep conservative Christian beliefs and previous anti-abortion stance.

He had been expected since February 24 to issue a ruling in the case, which asks him to suspend the FDA's approval of the drug while the lawsuit proceeds.

Apparently fearing protesters descending on the courthouse in Amarillo, Kacsmaryk originally sought to keep the hearing secret until the last minute, but it leaked to media.

If he does order the suspension, it could leave pregnant women with the alternative of using only misoprostol, the second pill in the medication abortion treatment.

But using misoprostol alone is more physically traumatic than the two-pill procedure, and some fear doctors might be unwilling to prescribe it alone.

If mifepristone is banned, "access to medication abortion would end across the country—even in those states where abortion rights are protected," the Center for Reproductive Rights said.

"The decision would be unprecedented, as you know, and devastating to women. And we may find ourselves in uncharted territory," White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters last week.

"We're closely working with the Justice Department and (the Department of Health and Human Services) on this, on how to be prepared for any range of outcomes," she added.

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