

U.K. rejects puberty blockers for children over concerns about safety, benefits



Former British Prime Minister Liz Truss delivers speech during a symposium of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China at the Diet Members Building Friday, Feb. 17, 2023, in Tokyo. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko) Former British Prime Minister Liz Truss ... more >

By Valerie Richardson
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Britain's National Health Service will no longer routinely prescribe puberty blockers for children seeking to switch to the opposite gender, citing a lack of evidence on the safety and benefits of such treatment.

In a major blow to the gender-transition industry, NHS England said that an evidence review by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence launched in 2020 found “no statistically significant difference in gender dysphoria, mental health, body image and psychosocial functioning in children and adolescents” treated with puberty-suppressing hormones.

“We have concluded that there is not enough evidence to support the safety or clinical effectiveness of PSH to make the treatment routinely available at this time,” said NHS England in a statement Tuesday, which is also Detransition Awareness Day.

Puberty blockers will continue to be available to those under 18 participating in clinical research trials. In addition, doctors may apply to prescribe the hormones on a case-by-case basis, according to the BBC.

“We have always been clear that children's safety and wellbeing is paramount, so we welcome this landmark decision by the NHS,” said Health Minister Maria Caulfield. “Ending the routine prescription of puberty blockers will help ensure that care is based on evidence, expert clinical opinion and is in the best interests of the child.”

The decision comes with European nations increasingly placing guardrails on the use of gender-transition drugs and procedures for those under 18 even as the Biden administration continues to push for children to have access to “gender-affirming care.”

Twenty-one red states have enacted bans on gender-transition drugs and surgeries for minors — Arizona bans surgeries only — while a dozen blue states have declared themselves sanctuary states for gender-affirming care.

In March 2023, the White House blasted the state bans, saying that “policies that stigmatize transgender children, for example, by denying them access to medically necessary health care or banning schools from using LGBTQI+ inclusive curriculum, contribute to worse mental health outcomes for children and put them at increased risk of bullying and attempted suicide.”

The Health and Human Services Department Office of Population Affairs’ guide to “Gender-Affirming Care and Young People” says that puberty blockers are “reversible,” although the British evidence review found that they “may reduce the expected increase in lumbar or femoral bone density during puberty.”

“There remains limited short-term and long-term safety data for GnRHa [hormones],” said NHS England.

Michael Shellenberger, president and founder of the right-tilting group Environmental Progress, urged the administration to follow NHS England’s lead by banning puberty blockers.

“We should use drugs to block the puberty of children confused about their gender, say medical groups and the media,” Mr. Shellenberger said. “But after reviewing the evidence, the UK government has just banned the use of puberty blockers for children. Biden should follow its lead and do the same here.”

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— Michael Shellenberger (@shellenberger) March 12, 2024

His organization released March 4 leaked files from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, the international authority on gender-identity treatment, showing that it “does not meet the standards of evidence-based medicine” and “members frequently discuss improvising treatments as they go along,” according to Environmental Progress.

Those decrying NHS England’s decision included Trans & Intersex Pride Dublin, which called it “devastating news for every young trans person to hear.”

“Access to blockers and hormones at age 19 improved my quality of life in ways I cannot even begin to describe,” said Jenny Maguir, co-organizer of the Dublin group, on X. “This is just hatred. Children are going to die because of this.”

Former British Prime Minister Liz Truss, a Conservative Party member, said she would introduce a bill to tighten further access to puberty blockers.

“I welcome NHS England’s decision to end the routine prescription of puberty blockers to children for gender dysphoria,” she said on X. “I urge the Government to back my Bill on Friday which will reinforce this in law and also prevent these drugs being supplied privately.”

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