

# Italy: RU-486 abortion pill will be available in hospitals

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ROME - Italy has given a final go-ahead to the abortion drug RU-486, capping years of debate and defying opposition from the Vatican.

The country's Drug Agency said Thursday that the last pending bureaucratic hurdle - publishing the new regulations in its official gazette - has been cleared and that the pill will be available in about two weeks.

Under the new regulations, it can only be administered by doctors in hospitals and cannot be sold in pharmacies.

RU-486 is available throughout much of Europe, but the Vatican - which opposes abortion and contraception - has voiced its opposition to the pill's legalization in Italy. The Vatican has warned of possible excommunication for doctors prescribing the pill, as well for women who use it.

First introduced in France two decades ago, the RU-486 pill is known chemically as mifepristone and causes an embryo to detach from the uterine wall. A second pill, misoprostol, is used afterward to cause contractions and push the embryo out of the uterus.

Italy already approved the so-called morning-after pill, which prevents a fertilized egg from implanting in the uterine wall and growing into an embryo. Abortions are also legal in the country.