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Doctors question aspects of Missouri transgender care limits

By LINDSEY TANNER March 21, 2023



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Glenda Starke wears a transgender flag as a counterprotest during a rally in favor of a ban on gender-affirming health care legislation, Monday, March 20, 2023, at the Missouri Statehouse in Jefferson City, Mo. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel)

Missouri's attorney general has said he will issue an emergency regulation that at least temporarily puts strict limits on transgender medical treatment for youth. The planned rule comes as legislators in that state and many others seek bans or other restrictions on

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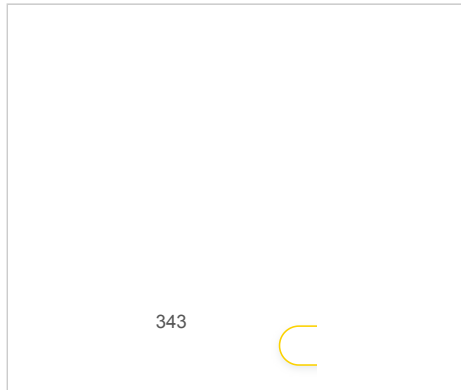
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contains
misleading or
incorrect
information
straight from the
playbook of anti-
trans activists.
Here's a look at
what the rule
does and what's
behind some of
its assertions.

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WHAT DOES THE MISSOURI EMERGENCY RULE DO?

Republican
Attorney
General Andrew
Bailey's rule will
target [treatment](#)
for gender-
questioning
children, which
typically begins
with puberty-
blocking drugs
to temporarily
pause sexual
development.
They are offered
early in puberty,
sometimes
before the age of
10. Sex
hormones —
estrogen or



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transgender boys
and girls to
transition. Some
older teens
choose to have
transgender
surgeries.

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Bailey's rule had
not been
formally filed as
of Tuesday, but
his office issued
a press release
outlining what
he called
"guardrails" for
the treatments.
The rule will
require an 18-
month waiting
period, 15 one-
hour therapy
sessions and
treatment of any
mental illnesses
before Missouri
doctors can
provide that

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children,

disclosure of information about puberty blocker drugs.

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ARE DRUGS TO TREAT GENDER IDENTITY DISORDER EXPERIMENTAL?

In the press release about the new rule, the attorney general's office says patients



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gender
identity disorder
is

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and not
approved by the
U.S. Food and
Drug
Administration.

The FDA
approved
puberty blockers
30 years ago to
treat children
with precocious
puberty — a
condition that
causes sexual
development to
begin much
earlier than
usual. Sex
hormones —
synthetic forms
of estrogen and
testosterone —
were approved
decades ago to
treat hormone
disorders or as
birth control
pills.

The FDA has not
approved the
medications
specifically to
treat gender-
questioning
youth, but they
have been used
for many years



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...
many medical
conditions
...
treat trans
patients say
those decades of
use are proof the
treatments are
not
experimental.

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ARE DRUGS TO TREAT GENDER IDENTITY DISORDER RISKY?

The press
release says
patients must
also be told the
FDA issued a
warning that
puberty blockers
can lead to
blindness and
brain swelling.

In April 2022,
the FDA [added a
warning](#) to
labeling for



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...
cerebri, which

...
swelling inside
the skull.

The FDA said
the condition
was found in six
patients aged 5
to 12 years. Five
of the girls were
using the drugs
for early-onset
puberty. The
sixth was using
the drugs for
transgender
care. Their
symptoms —
including
headaches, optic
nerve swelling,
blurred vision or
vision loss —
resolved or were
resolving in at
least four of the
patients, the
warning
announcement
said.

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there were too

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condition was in
youth using

family doctors
and it did not
move to limit
their use.

Patients also
must be told that
Sweden's
National Board
of Health and
Welfare has
declared that the
risks of puberty
blockers and sex
hormones for
gender-
questioning
youth "outweigh
the possible
benefits,"
according to
Bailey's press
release. The
Swedish agency
did make that
declaration last
year, saying that
the treatment in
youth should be
reserved for
"exceptional
cases," citing
what it said was
a lack of strong
evidence on
effectiveness
and safety, and
concerns about
young patients
changing their

transitioning.

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Evidence

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[detransitioning](#)
is not as
common as
opponents of
transgender
medical
treatment for
youth contend,
though the few
studies that exist
have
weaknesses.

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The release says
that the
Endocrine
Society, which
represents
specialists who
treat hormone
conditions,
found that about
85% of young
children
diagnosed with
gender
dysphoria grow
out of it by their
teens. The



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statement in its

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recommends
against starting
...
before puberty.
But a
spokesperson
said the society
opposes using
the guidelines to
discourage care.

And experts say
evidence shows
that
detransitioning
is uncommon in
older children
who begin
treatment after
puberty has
begun, following
recommendations
from the society
and other
medical groups.

Bailey's release
says treatment
should be denied
unless doctors
ensure at least
annually that
"social
contagion" has
not influenced a
patient's gender
identity. It says
one study "notes
that an
individual whose
friend identifies
as transgender is



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That appears to be a reference to a widely criticized 2018 study that suggested transgender identities among teens could be contagious. The study was based on surveys of a selective group of parents who opposed their children's gender identities, skewing the results.

WHAT DO THE MISSOURI GUIDELINES SAY ABOUT COUNSELING?

Medical associations recommend psychological counseling for



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Missouri
regulation says

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consist of at
least 15 hours
over at least 18
months, the
release says.

Critics say that
recommendation
is prescriptive
and arbitrary.

“There is no
good scientific
evidence to
determine how
long such an
evaluation
should last,” said
Dr. Jack
Drescher, editor
of the gender
dysphoria
chapter in the
latest edition of
the American
Psychiatric
Association’s
diagnostic
manual.

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