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## **If you're a 14-year-old girl in Turkmenistan, get ready for a gynecological exam**

By Farangis Najibullah

RFE/RL (24.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2NrJzLt> - School administrators in Turkmenistan's Mary Province have ordered female students age 14 and above to undergo mandatory gynecological tests, a move explained as part of state measures to ensure good behavior among youth.

The announcement was made to parents ahead of a weeklong school holiday that started on October 22.

Despite the students being minors, school directors told the parents that their children will see gynecologists regardless of whether or not their families consent to such tests.

Reports about the directive were given to RFE/RL by several parents after they attended meetings with school directors. The names of the parents cannot be disclosed due to potential action against them by officials in the tightly controlled authoritarian state.

The mandatory gynecological tests appear to be unrelated to routine preventative health exams given at most schools.

Parents said the tests were explained as being part of a policy designed to ensure good behavior among young people and to prevent teenage pregnancies.

"Explaining the necessity for such tests, the officials told the parents that some young girls have gone astray in search of a good life," a correspondent for RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reported, quoting several parents who attended meetings in Mary Province schools Nos. 8 and 14.

The parents said the officials cited alleged incidents of minors secretly giving birth at home or having abortions.

### ***Morality Lessons***

To prevent such situations, school directors instructed parents to be vigilant and keep their children under close watch, to check their mobile phones, and to control which websites they visit.

The parents were also tasked with accompanying their daughters when they are anywhere except for school or home.

The parents of students who have part-time jobs were ordered to make sure their children stop working.

There were reports that some teenage students had been working as part-time servers at local restaurants and cafes in Mary, earning about \$10 a day.

Parents were not told when or where the gynecological exams for their daughters would take place.

RFE/RL tried to contact the Mary Education Department as well as officials at schools Nos. 8 and 14, but the phone calls haven't been answered.

The announcement about the mandatory tests in Mary comes just days after schools in the neighboring Lebap Province conducted so-called morality lessons for female students.

Morality classes in Lebap reportedly included lectures by officials from the regional prosecutors office, police, and the public health service.

In the Turkmen capital, Ashgabat, similar lessons were offered to parents, several city residents told RFE/RL earlier this month.

Major topics in morality classes included the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and teenage pregnancies. Education officials told the parents that smoking and alcohol consumption have gone up among teenagers in Turkmenistan in recent years.

Authorities in Turkmenistan have not made any public comments about the planned gynecological tests or the morality classes.

The Turkmen government under longtime President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov puts restrictions on and exercises control over virtually every facet of life, with Turkmenistan constantly ranked as one of the lowest countries on international indexes that measure freedom.