

Families Testify for Ephedra Ban

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CBS Evening News with Dan Rather & Joie Chen

DAN RATHER, CBS ANCHOR: Congress weighed in today in the long battle over whether to ban ephedra supplements. Millions of people take them to boost energy and lose weight. Critics say some users die of heart attacks and strokes.

CBS's Joie Chen reports, today's ephedra testimony went from the medical to the emotional.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JOIE CHEN, CBS CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Baltimore Orioles pitcher Steve Bechler died during spring training this year, after he took the herbal supplement ephedra, apparently to shed 10 extra pounds he'd put on in the off season.

Today, his heartbroken parents came to Capitol Hill, leading the fight to get ephedra banned.

PAT BECHLER, VICTIM'S MOTHER: They took our pride and joy from us, and his wife, and his baby, and they took our baby from our lives.

CHEN: The Bechlers sat with Kevin Riggins, whose son, Sean, took ephedra to boost his

energy, and improve his football game. The 16-year-old died of a heart attack. His father is angry with the supplement makers, who, he says, market it along with bubble gum and candy.

KEVIN RIGGINS, VICTIM'S FATHER: They are no more than drug pushers, because they are marketing a deadly substance, and they don't care.

P. BECHLER: How many Steve Bechlers or Sean Riggins have to die to prove that these are not safe? They paid -- I'm sorry.

We need to get this off the market.

CHEN: Moved by the dramatic testimony, and a new government report which adds to growing concerns, several members indicated they are ready to act.

REP. JAN **SCHAKOWSKY** (D), ILLINOIS: Ephedra does more harm than good, and it should be removed from the market.

CHEN: Ephedra makers insist their product is safe when used properly.

RUSSELL SCHRECK, CEO, METABOLIFE: These events do not shake us from the firm belief in the safety and efficacy of our products.

CHEN: A claim that angers Steve Bechler's father.

ERNIE BECHLER, VICTIM'S FATHER: No matter what they try to say, no matter what they do, they'll never convince me that their product did not kill my kid.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

CHEN: Until now, the FDA has said that it doesn't have the power to pull ephedra from the market. But today, said it is considering options, including an outright ban - Dan.

RATHER: Live on Capitol Hill, Joie Chen.