



Emergency Contraception
Get it *before* you need it!

Feminist Majority Foundation's Emergency Contraception Campaign

Understanding Emergency Contraception

www.overthecounterec.org

What is Emergency Contraception (EC)?

Emergency contraception (EC) is a method of *preventing* pregnancy *after* unprotected sexual intercourse—when a condom breaks, after a sexual assault, or any time unprotected sexual intercourse occurs. EC pills are often called “morning after pills” but it can be taken up to 120 hours after unprotected intercourse, although they are most effective when taken within 24 hours.

Different Types of Emergency Contraception Pills

There are different types of emergency contraception pills. Until recently, there have been two types of pre-packaged pills, Plan B® and Preven®. Plan B® contains the hormone progestin and is more effective than Preven®, which contains the hormones estrogen and progestin. Additionally, Plan B® causes fewer side effects such as nausea and vomiting. Preven® was recently discontinued, but may still be on some pharmacy shelves for a limited period of time.

In addition to Plan B® and Preven®, there are more than brands of birth control pills that can prevent pregnancy when used as EC. The doses of birth control pills vary, so it is important to check with a health care provider to make sure that the correct brand and dosage are used. For information about brands of oral contraceptives that can be used as emergency contraception and to find a provider in your area, visit www.not-2-late.com.

Young Women Need Increased Access to EC

Many college health care centers and doctors' offices do not offer EC or are closed on the weekends, leaving women unable to find timely access to an EC provider. The Feminist Majority Foundation, together with other women's rights and reproductive health groups, campaigned successfully for the FDA to make emergency contraception pills available over-the-counter. Women ages 18 and over will be able to buy Plan B emergency contraceptive pills in pharmacies sometime beginning in early 2007. Some states such as Alaska, California, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Washington currently allow women to obtain EC at certain certified pharmacies without a prescription. However, some pharmacists and pharmacies have refused outright to fill prescriptions for EC (Wal-Mart®, among others). For additional information, please see www.overthecounterec.org.

How does EC Work?

While most effective if taken within 24 hours, EC can be taken up to 120 hours after unprotected intercourse. The hormones in EC can delay or prevent ovulation, or interfere with fertilization or implantation. Neither a pelvic examination nor a pregnancy test is required before treatment.

EC is Extremely Safe and Effective

When taken within 24 hours of unprotected intercourse, EC can be up to 95% effective. Overall, EC lowers a woman's risk of becoming pregnant by 75-88%. EC has minimal side effects, the most common being nausea. However, anti-nausea medication can be taken an hour before the first dose of EC to reduce this side effect.

EC Is Essential to Women's Health and Lives!

Emergency contraception is an important backup method of birth control because it increases women's control over their reproduction. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, there are 3 million unintended pregnancies in the US each year. EC has the potential to cut the number of unintended pregnancies in HALF and prevent as many as 800,000 abortions each year.

Advance prescriptions are written during routine check-ups so that women always have a prescription or the medication on-hand. Advance prescriptions also give women access to EC on weekends or outside regular doctor's hours. However, only 20% of OB/GYNs report having discussed EC with patients during regular exams.