

## Emergency Contraception Pills (ECPs)

### What are emergency contraception pills (ECPs)?

Emergency contraception pills (ECPs) are used as emergency birth control to help prevent you from becoming pregnant **after** you have unprotected sex. These are sometimes called "morning after" pills. You can use them for up to five days after having sex - not just the next morning. **ECPs should be taken as soon as possible after having unprotected sex.** The sooner you take them, the more effective they are.

ECPs are *not* a substitute for regular birth control pills. ECPs do **not** protect against sexually transmitted diseases. ECPs will not cause an abortion or miscarriage if you are already pregnant. They can only prevent a pregnancy from happening in the first place.

### How do ECPs work?

ECPs contain hormones that can help stop you from getting pregnant after unprotected sex. However, like any birth control method, they are not 100 per cent effective.

ECPs may help stop you from getting pregnant by:

- Stopping or delaying your ovaries from releasing eggs or ovulation;
- Making it harder for sperm to get into your eggs or fertilization;
- Making the lining of your uterus thinner, so fertilized eggs cannot attach to your uterus.

### When can I use ECPs?

You can use ECPs if you are worried you will get pregnant after having sex because:

- You had unprotected sex;
- The condom broke, slipped or leaked;
- Your diaphragm slipped, broke or came out too early (less than 6 hrs);
- You missed taking two or more of your birth control pills, or you took your progesterone-only pill three or more hours late;

- You were late starting your next cycle of birth control including vaginal rings, Depo-Provera<sup>®</sup>, or contraceptive patch;
- You were forced to have sex without a reliable method of birth control; or
- Your partner ejaculated on your genitals.

### How long after I have sex can I take the pills?

ECPs work best if you take them as soon as possible after you have unprotected sex. However, they may still be taken up to 5 days later. There is less chance of the pills working the longer you wait to take them after you have sex.

### What kinds of pills can I use?

In Canada, there are 2 kinds of ECPs you can use – Plan B<sup>™</sup> and Ovral<sup>®</sup>:

- Plan B<sup>™</sup> contains progestin only. Plan B<sup>™</sup> is more effective than Ovral<sup>®</sup> and causes fewer side effects.
- Ovral<sup>®</sup> contains both progestin and estrogen.

Your health care professional will explain how to take these pills. It is very important to take ECPs exactly as recommended. Sometimes your health care professional may recommend taking other prescription birth control pills as ECPs. You **must** speak to your health care professional before doing this. Not all birth control pills can be used this way.

### Are there any side effects?

Side effects can include stomach upset and vomiting or throwing up. To reduce your chance of feeling sick, take a medication that helps prevent stomach upset such as Gravol<sup>®</sup>, at least 30 minutes before you take the pill(s). If you throw up within one hour of taking the ECP, you need to take another dose of ECPs.

Less common side effects may include headache, dizziness, fatigue, breast tenderness, or spotting or bleeding.

## Can anyone use ECPs?

Most women can safely use ECPs even if they cannot use birth control pills as their normal method of birth control. Your doctor or health care professional can tell you if you can use ECPs.

If you are unable to take ECPs, another option is available. A copper IUD (intrauterine device) can be inserted into the uterus by your doctor. An IUD can be effective in preventing pregnancy if inserted up to seven days after unprotected sex. An IUD costs more than ECPs. However, an IUD can remain in your uterus for up to 5 years as an effective form of birth control if you wish.

## Where can I get ECPs?

You can get ECPs by visiting:

- Your doctor;
- A pharmacy;
- A walk-in clinic;
- A youth clinic;
- A women's health centre or sexual assault centre; or
- A sexual health clinic.

Or by calling:

- *Options for Sexual Health Facts of Life Line*  
In Vancouver, call 604-731-7803, or outside Vancouver, call 1-800-739-7367, or visit [www.optionsforsexualhealth.org](http://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org).
- *ECP hotline*. Call 1-888-668-2528 (1-888-NOT-2-LATE). You will be given the phone numbers of agencies and pharmacies near you that provide ECPs.

## How much do ECPs cost?

ECPs cost between \$15 and \$50. Youth clinics, health centres and sexual health clinics often provide pills at a lower cost.

## How can I tell if the pills worked or not?

The effectiveness of ECPs depends on how soon you take the pills, where you are in your menstrual cycle, and the type of pills you take.

You should have a period within three weeks after taking ECP. If you do *not* have a period within three weeks, a pregnancy test is needed. A pregnancy test can be done by a health care

professional or at home. You can buy home pregnancy tests at a pharmacy or grocery store.

## Do I need my parent's consent if I am a teenager?

No. If you are old enough to get pregnant, you can use or ask your doctor or health care professional for contraceptives, including ECPs, without your parent or guardian's consent.

## For more information

- If you think you may already be pregnant, call the Pregnancy Options hotline. In Vancouver, call 604-875-3163, or outside Vancouver, call 1-888-875-3163.
- If you have been forced to have sex against your will, call the WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) Rape Crisis Centre. In Vancouver, call 604-255-6344, or outside Vancouver, dial 0 and ask to make a collect call to that number.
- If you would like more information on sexually transmitted infections, visit [www.stdresource.com](http://www.stdresource.com). In Vancouver, call 604-872-6652, or outside Vancouver, call 1-800-661-4337.

**For more BC HealthFile topics visit [www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm), or visit your local public health unit.**

**Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:**

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

**Visit BC HealthGuide OnLine – a world of health information you can trust at [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org)**