

## **Emergency Contraception**

### **What is Emergency Contraception?**

Emergency contraception (EC) can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. EC can be used if any form of contraception fails, if you have unplanned sex, or if you are forced to have sex. It is often known as “the morning after pill,” but this name is misleading because EC can prevent pregnancy up to 120 hours (five days) after unprotected sex. However, the sooner it is taken, the better. Used within 12 hours, EC reduces the risk of pregnancy by up to 99%.

### **How EC works**

EC is simply regular birth control pills in higher doses. It can prevent pregnancy by delaying ovulation (when eggs are released from the ovary) or preventing fertilization (when an egg and sperm join). EC prevents a pregnancy - it does not end one.

### **EC cannot cause an abortion**

EC is often confused with the “abortion pill” (mifepristone or RU-486). This pill is taken up to nine weeks into pregnancy. Mifepristone causes abortion; EC does not.

If you are already pregnant, EC will not harm the fetus.

Some women may take EC without realizing they are already pregnant. EC will NOT harm an established pregnancy. Babies born to women who continue taking birth control pills before finding out that they are pregnant do not have higher rates of birth defects.

### **EC is extremely safe**

Even women who cannot take oral contraceptives for birth control can take them for emergency contraception because they are only used for a brief period of time. The medical community agrees that EC is so safe it is available without a prescription.

### **Side Effects**

Some women experience temporary side effects when taking EC pills - mainly nausea or vomiting. Less common side effects include temporary headache, breast tenderness, dizziness, fluid retention, mood changes, menstrual irregularity or abdominal cramps. These side effects rarely last longer than a day or two. If vomiting occurs it is not usually necessary to take an additional dose because the medication has been absorbed into the bloodstream. However, some clinicians recommend an additional dose if vomiting occurs within one hour.