

What is Emergency Contraception (EC)?

Emergency Contraception (EC) is medication that prevents pregnancy for women who have had unprotected sex or whose birth control method may have failed. They are intended as a backup contraception to be used in sudden, unexpected situations.

There are two major methods of EC available in the United States:

- Morning After Pills (Also known as Emergency Contraception Pills or ECPs)
 - Plan B One-Step and other generic versions
 - Ella
 - Standard birth control pills taken in larger doses
- IntraUterine Devices (IUDs)¹
 - Copper IUDs (Paragard)
 - Levonorgestrel IUDs (Mirena and Liletta)

How does EC work?

Morning After Pills work by preventing or delaying egg ovulation. IUDs work by preventing sperm from physically reaching the egg².

EC must be taken or inserted shortly after unprotected sex because they become less effective over time. In general, they must be taken or inserted within 5 days of unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy.³⁴ However, this varies depending on which method or brand you use.

Why do women seek out EC?

Women may need to use EC because they forgot to take their birth control pill, they are not using any birth control method, the condom their partner used broke, or they were sexually assaulted and want to prevent pregnancy.

OTHER EC FAQs



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Do I need a prescription for EC?

There's no prescription required to get the Plan B or its generic equivalents. They can be purchased over the counter at any HEB, Walgreens, Target, or online retailer (like Amazon). A prescription is required to get Ella, and the standard birth control pills. A clinic visit is required to have an IUD inserted. Some insurance plans will cover emergency contraception.

Is EC safe?

Large bodies of research show that it is very safe for most women to use the morning after pill and other forms of EC.

Is EC effective?

Morning after pills reduce the likelihood of pregnancy by 75% to 90% - depending on which which type you use, and whether you use them within their recommended timeframes. But please keep in mind Ella has been proven to be more effective than Plan B for people who weigh more than 165 pounds.⁵

IUDs reduce the likelihood of pregnancy by more than 99% - if they are inserted within the recommended timeframes.⁶

Does EC harm an existing pregnancy?

No, using EC does not harm an existing pregnancy. EC prevents pregnancy from occurring, and it is ineffective once a pregnancy has already occurred.²

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¹ "Birth Control." FDA, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 13 July 2023.
www.fda.gov/consumers/free-publications-women/birth-control#EC.

² "Emergency Contraception." ACOG, The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Aug. 2019.
www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/emergency-contraception.

³ "Emergency Contraception - US SPR." CDC Contraceptive Guidance for Health Care Providers, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 Mar. 2023.
www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/contraception/mmw/spr/emergency.html.

⁴ "Emergency Contraception." Women's Health Policy, KFF, 4 Aug. 2022.
www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/fact-sheet/emergency-contraception/.

⁵ Gupta, Alisha Haridasani, and Dani Blum. "Does Plan B Have a Weight Limit?" *The New York Times*, The New York Times Company, 30 June 2022.
www.nytimes.com/2022/06/30/well/family/plan-b-weight-limit.html.

⁶ "Emergency Contraception." Women's Health Policy, KFF, 4 Aug. 2022.
www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/fact-sheet/emergency-contraception/.