

Need more information?

This document provides some very basic information about emergency contraception and how it works. If EC is something you want to know more about, ask the hospital emergency personnel about their policy on EC or ask the sexual assault advocate for assistance in getting this information.

Local Support/Assistance:

For more information, contact

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

535 W. Jefferson St.
Springfield, IL 62761
217-782-5750

Women's Health-line 888-522-1282

TTY (hearing impaired use only)
800-547-0466

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**Developed by the Illinois Department of Public Health
in cooperation with the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault**



State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Public Health

What You Should Know About Emergency Contraception



Illinois law provides that victims of sexual assault are entitled to medically and factually accurate information about emergency contraception (EC) when they receive emergency care in a hospital. Under the Sexual Assault Survivors Emergency Treatment Act (410 ILCS 70/2.2), Illinois hospitals are required to have a policy in place regarding emergency contraception. Individual hospital protocols must ensure that each victim of sexual assault will receive medically and factually accurate written and oral information about emergency contraception; the indications and counter-indications and risks associated with the use of emergency contraception; and a description of how and when victims may be provided emergency contraception.

What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception is a concentrated dose of regular oral contraceptives taken in one dose or in two doses over 12 hours. It reduces the chances of getting pregnant following a sexual assault. Emergency contraceptive pills can prevent pregnancy up to 72 hours (three days) after unprotected sex. Studies have shown that even if EC pills are taken as late as 120 hours (5 days) after unprotected intercourse, they may prevent pregnancy. However, it is most effective within the first 24 hours. The sooner EC is used, the more likely it is to prevent pregnancy. EC does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.

How does EC work?

EC prevents pregnancy by temporarily stopping eggs from being released from the ovary (ovulation). It also may stop the egg and sperm from meeting (fertilization) or prevent a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus (implantation). If you are already pregnant, emergency contraceptive pills are not useful.

Does EC always work?

EC significantly reduces the chances of a pregnancy occurring. There are two factors that influence its effectiveness: the amount of time since unprotected sex, and the point in a woman's cycle at which she had sex. Combined EC pills are about 75 percent effective. Progestin-only EC pills are 89 percent effective if used within 72 hours and 95 percent effective if used within 24 hours. The sooner a woman undergoes EC after unprotected sex, the more likely a pregnancy can be prevented.

If I am already pregnant, will EC hurt the fetus?

There is no evidence that EC causes birth defects. However, there have been no studies specific to taking birth control at this dosage. What is known is that babies born to women who continue taking birth control pills before finding out they are pregnant do not have higher rates of birth defects. EC should not be confused with a medical abortion or with RU 486, the medication that can be used to induce abortions.

Can anyone use EC?

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. However, some women may suffer side effects when taking EC. About 50 percent of women taking the combined estrogen and progestin pills and 20 percent taking progestin-only pills feel nauseated. Similarly, approximately 6 percent of women who take progestin-only pills and 20 percent taking combination pills experience vomiting.

Where and how can EC be obtained?

If EC is a treatment you want to obtain, ask the personnel at the hospital where you are being treated if you can get EC there. Some hospitals, for religious or ethical reasons, will not administer EC in certain circumstances. EC is also available from drugstores and health centers without a prescription for women and men 17 and older. The cost of EC varies and may be anywhere from \$10 to \$70. If you cannot afford to purchase EC, there may be an organization or health clinic in the immediate area that will provide EC for free or at a reduced rate. If you received an Illinois HFS Sexual Assault Emergency Treatment Program Authorization for Payment Voucher at the hospital, you can use the voucher to obtain EC at a pharmacy at no charge to you. If you are younger than 17 and did not receive EC at the hospital, you'll need to go to a health center or private health care provider for a prescription. You should contact your physician, a local rape crisis center, your local health department, a Planned Parenthood agency, a women's health clinic or a family planning provider for appropriate follow-up care and counseling or for assistance.