

Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception is not to be used as a regular method of birth control but, if needed, it can help prevent unplanned pregnancies.

If you have had unprotected sex and you already know that you do not want to get pregnant, emergency contraception can help prevent unplanned pregnancies if used as soon as possible.

Some of the reasons that you may consider using emergency contraception include:

- Missed birth control pill, patch, or injection
- No contraception was used
- Non-consensual sexual intercourse (sexual assault)
- The condom slipped, broke, or leaked
- Error in the calculation of the fertility period

Emergency contraception is intended for occasional use only, not as a regular method of birth control.

There are two types of emergency contraception to choose from in Canada:

1. “Morning after pills”

“Morning after pills” are the original method of emergency contraception. In the past, morning after pills were regular birth control pills, taken in higher doses, 12 hours apart. There are better and more effective methods available on the market today, with fewer side effects.

LNG-EC pills (Plan B, Norlevo, Option 2, and Next Choice) all contain a progestin called levonorgestrel. These pills are available in Canadian pharmacies without a prescription. The effectiveness of LNG-EC pills is highest when taken within 24 hours of unprotected sex and declines the later they are taken; but they can be taken up to five days later. LNG-EC pills will not harm the fetus, should it not be able to prevent the pregnancy. A high body weight (a body mass index (BMI) greater than 25) may decrease the effectiveness of these pills, so it is a good idea to speak with a health care professional to make sure these pills are the right choice for you.

A second morning after pill, UPA-EC (Ulipristal acetate 30 mg, ella®), is now available in Canada, currently by prescription only. It is recommended for its greater effectiveness over a longer period of time after unprotected sex (up to 5 days) and appears to be equally as effective for those who have a higher BMI.

2. Copper Intrauterine Device (IUD)

The most effective method of emergency contraception is a copper intrauterine device (IUD), which is inserted by a doctor within 7 days of unprotected intercourse. While currently available by prescription only, the copper IUD provides ongoing secure birth control.