



Help Women Prevent Unintended Pregnancy: Take Steps to Ensure Access to Emergency Contraception

“Nicole” was 24 years old when her usual method of contraception failed. She was on vacation and didn’t want to take any chances that she might get pregnant. She made an appointment with a doctor first thing the next morning so that she could get a prescription for emergency contraception (EC). But when she took the prescription to a local pharmacy, the pharmacy couldn’t fill her prescription because it didn’t stock EC. Anxious to prevent an unintended pregnancy, she had to search for another pharmacy – one that stocked and provided EC – which delayed the care she needed.*

For women who have unprotected sex or experience contraceptive failure and want to avoid pregnancy, timing is critical. EC, often referred to as the “morning after pill,” has the potential to reduce the risk of pregnancy by as much as 89 percent if the first dose is taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse. It is most effective if taken within 12 hours of unprotected intercourse, but can be effective up to at least 120 hours. Most experts agree that it is more effective the sooner it is taken.**

EC is generally available only by prescription, except in a handful of states, which allow pharmacists to dispense EC without a doctor’s prescription. However, many pharmacies fail to stock EC or in some instances fail to provide EC upon request, making it difficult for many women in situations like “Nicole’s” to obtain EC when they need it most.

Because EC has been proven safe and effective, major medical groups, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Medical Association, and the American Public Health Association, support making EC available without a prescription.

Putting politics before science, in May 2004, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) denied over-the-counter status to Plan B – the only brand of EC available today in the U.S. – leaving access largely to prescription-only and dependent upon the practices of individual pharmacies. The FDA will be reconsidering this decision in early 2005.

Take Action – Contact Local Pharmacies to See if They Stock Emergency Contraception

Visit or call your local pharmacies and ask if they stock and provide EC. Report the results of your research to your local ACLU. Use the model script attached to this Action Alert to get started. If the pharmacies in your area do not stock EC, you can provide them with an informational flyer, such as *Facts on EC and Plan B*, available at: http://www.backupyourbirthcontrol.org/toolkit/pdf/FactSheet_EC-PlanB.pdf. Work with your local ACLU to publicize the results of your pharmacy survey and educate your

community about the need to ensure access to this safe and effective back-up birth control method.

https://www.oursybil.org/ASD/home/RFP/EC_ModelScriptPharmacyCalls.pdf

Take Action – Contact the FDA to Voice Your Support For Having EC Available Over-the-Counter

Let the FDA know that you support making EC available over-the-counter. Send a copy of the attached letter to the FDA urging it to put science and the public health before politics by making EC available without a prescription.

https://www.oursybil.org/ASD/home/RFP/EC_FDAModelLetter.doc

Background information:

For additional information on EC, go to the Back Up Your Birth Control website:

<http://www.backupyourbirthcontrol.org/>.

For additional information about the FDA's failure to make EC available over-the-counter, see the ACLU's letter urging the FDA to reconsider its decision:

<http://www.aclu.org/ReproductiveRights/ReproductiveRights.cfm?ID=16020&c=225>

* Nicole is a pseudonym.

** EC should not be confused with the early-abortion pill, mifepristone (also known as RU-486) – EC will not terminate or harm an existing pregnancy.