

The Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)

What is ECP?

- Used by someone with ovaries in their body, ECP is an emergency contraception medication used to prevent pregnancy after penis-vagina sex when birth control or condoms weren't used or didn't work (e.g., the condom broke)
- Sometimes it is nicknamed the "Morning After Pill" although it can be used up to 5 days after sex.
- It is not an abortion pill. If someone is already pregnant it will not harm the fetus. It is only a pregnancy prevention tool.

How does ECP work?

ECP is a strong dose of hormones that does a few things:

- Stops the ovaries from releasing an egg cell. If there is no egg cell, pregnancy is not possible.
- Makes the cervical mucus thicker so it is harder for sperm to get into the cervix.
- Makes the lining of the uterus thinner, so it is harder for a fertilized egg cell to stick to the uterus. Even if an egg cell is released and fertilized, if it is unable to implant into the uterine lining a pregnancy will not happen.

When might someone need ECP?

Someone may use ECP if:

- They have had penis-vagina sex without using any birth control, or think that the birth control used may not have worked.
- They have forgotten to take or change their birth control. For example, if a person:
 - Has missed two or more birth control pills in a pack
 - Has removed the patch for more than 24 hours or forgotten to restart the cycle
 - Has removed the vaginal ring for more than 2 hours or forgotten to restart the cycle
 - Is more than a week late for their next scheduled birth control shot.
- They have experienced sexual assault that included unprotected penis-vagina sex. If you have experienced any form of sexual violence, remember that it is **not** your fault. You can call the Klinik Sexual Assault Crisis Line at 204-786-8631 or toll-free at 1-888-292-7565 to speak with a counsellor.

How soon after sex should ECP be used?

Take ECP as soon as possible after sexual activity. ECP is most effective at preventing pregnancy the sooner it is taken:

- If taken within 24 hours of unprotected sex, it will reduce the chances of pregnancy by about 95%.
- If taken within 48 hours of unprotected sex, it will reduce the chances of pregnancy by about 85%.
- If taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex, it will reduce the chances of pregnancy by about 58%.
- ECP may work up to 5 days after unprotected sex.
- You can expect a period within 1-3 weeks of taking ECP. If you don't get your period as expected, consider taking a pregnancy test.

Where can I get ECP?

You do not need a prescription for ECP. It can be purchased from most pharmacies. The cost is determined by the store and can range from \$12 - \$50.

You can also get ECP for free or low-cost from:

- A Teen Clinic (for youth 21 or younger).
- A nursing station.
- A community health clinic.

Does ECP always work?

- No. ECP helps prevent pregnancy, but no birth control method is 100% effective.
- The sooner someone takes ECP, the more effective it is.
- It will not stop a pregnancy that has already happened. If you don't get your period as expected, consider taking a pregnancy test.

Are there any side effects?

Yes, there can be side effects. Serious side effects are rare. Contact your health care provider if side effects last more than 2 days. Minor side effects include:

- Bleeding between periods.
- A period that comes at a different time than usual.
- Abdominal (stomach) pain.
- Headaches or feeling tired.
- Nausea (upset stomach). You can take anti-nausea medication with ECP.
- Vomiting. If you vomit within a few hours of taking ECP it may not work. Talk with a pharmacist or health care provider for directions on how to proceed.

Can I take ECP whenever I have penis-vagina sex?

- ECP is intended as emergency contraception only. While safe, it is difficult for your body to process.
- If you are sexually active, having penis-vagina sex, and do not want to get pregnant consider other, more reliable, long-term birth control options such as condoms, the pill, the patch, the vaginal ring, or an IUD/S.

Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse. If you need a regular health care provider, call the Family Doctor Finder at 204-786-7111.
- From the Facts of Life Line: e-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.
- From a Teen Clinic if you are 21 or younger.
- Online at www.serc.mb.ca or our youth website, www.teentalk.ca.