

The Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)

What is the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)?

Used by someone with ovaries in their body, ECP is an emergency contraception medication used to prevent pregnancy after 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 for up to 5 days after sex.
- It is not an abortion pill. If someone is already pregnant it will do nothing to harm the fetus. It is only a pregnancy prevention tool.

How does ECP work?

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

- Stop the ovaries from releasing an egg cell. If there is no egg cell, pregnancy is not possible.
- Makes the cervical mucus thicker so that it's harder for sperm to get into the cervix.
- It also 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've had penis-vagina sex without using any birth control or think that the birth control used may not have worked.
- They've forgotten to take or change their birth control
 - Missing two or more birth control pills in a pack.
 - Removing the patch for more than 24 hours or forgetting to restart the cycle.
 - Removing the vaginal ring for more than 2 hours or forgetting to restart the cycle.
 - More than a week late for the next scheduled birth control shot.
- Sexual Assault that included unprotected penis-vagina sex. If you experience any form of sexual violence, remember 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. Pharmacy prices are set 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 is 100%.
- The sooner someone takes ECP, the better chance it has of working.
- 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. If side effects last more than 2 days contact your healthcare provider. 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 don't want to get pregnant consider other, more reliable, long-term birth control options such as condoms, the pill, the patch, the shot, 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 healthcare provider, call the Family Doctor Finder at 204-786-7111.
- From the Facts of Life (SERC): 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