

Emergency contraception

This leaflet explains the safe use of emergency contraception.

What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraceptives are methods of preventing pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse. They do not protect against sexually transmitted infections. Emergency contraception can be used when a condom breaks, after a sexual assault, or any time unprotected sexual intercourse occurs. Do not use emergency contraceptives as your only protection against pregnancy if you are sexually active, or planning to be, because they are not as effective as any ongoing contraceptive method. Emergency contraceptives available in the United Kingdom include pills and the copper-T IUD.

Emergency contraceptive pills

There are mainly two types:

- One type uses hormones that are the same type and dose as hormones used in some kinds of ordinary birth control pills. These hormones are called oestrogen and progesterone (combined ECPs). About 50% of women who use this type feel sick and 20% vomit. Use of this pill cuts the chance of pregnancy by 75%. This does not mean that 25% of women using ECPs will become pregnant. Rather, if 100 women had unprotected intercourse once during the second or third week of their cycle, about eight would become pregnant; following treatment with ECPs, only two would become pregnant - a 75% reduction.
- The other type of emergency contraceptive pill contains only the hormone called progesterone (progesterone only ECPs). It is more effective than the first type and the risk of *sickness* (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting is also lower.

Some people call emergency contraceptive pills *morning after pills*. However, you do not have to wait until the morning after. You can start the pills right away, or up to five days after you have had unprotected sex; that is, sex during which you did not use birth control or your birth control may have failed. Therapy is more effective the earlier it is started within the 72 hour window. Your doctor will tell you to take the pills as soon as possible after unprotected sex.

Not all brands of birth control pills can be used for emergency contraception.

Can I only get emergency contraception at an Emergency Department?

No. Emergency contraception can be obtained from any general practice that provides contraceptive services, any young person's service or Brook clinic, any sexual health clinic, some genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, most NHS walk-in centres (in England only), some pharmacies (there may be age restrictions), most NHS minor injuries units, and some hospital Emergency Departments.

Most women can safely use emergency contraceptive pills, even if they cannot use birth control pills as their regular method of birth control.

Copper-T IUD as emergency contraception

The copper-T intrauterine device (IUD) can be inserted up to five days after unprotected intercourse to prevent pregnancy. Insertion of a copper-T IUD is much more effective than use of ECPs or minipills, reducing the risk of pregnancy following unprotected intercourse by more than 99%. Also, a copper-T IUD can be left in place to provide continuous effective contraception for up to 10 years. But IUDs are not ideal for all women. Women at risk of sexually transmitted infections because they or their partners have other sexual partners may not be good candidates for IUD's, because insertion of the IUD can lead to pelvic infection which can cause infertility if untreated. The risk of pelvic infection from insertion of an IUD is slight among women not at risk of sexually transmitted infections.

Tell us your views

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your treatment and care, please speak to a senior member of staff or to the nurse looking after you. The matrons are also available during normal working hours and they welcome your views.

You can also pick up a copy of the Trust leaflet called 'Talk to us', which explains how you can raise concerns or give feedback on your experience at the hospital.

Friends and Family Test

Whatever your experience you can give feedback by answering the Friends & Family test question – *How likely are you to recommend our service to family and friends if they needed similar care or treatment?* - by going online www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/friends-and-family-survey.htm.

Further information

More information is available on the Trust website: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Emergency Department

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