

# 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 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.

## **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 'Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)' 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 – 'Overall, how was your experience of our service?' – by going online [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/friends-and-family-survey.htm](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/friends-and-family-survey.htm).

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Emergency Department, June 2022.

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