

Talking about emergency contraception



Not using emergency contraception can leave women at risk of an unplanned pregnancy, but there are many barriers that can stop them getting the help they need, when they need it, including lack of knowledge, stigma and embarrassment. Clinicians and pharmacists can help ensure patients and customers are aware of all their options, and enable them to confidently make the right decisions for them.

What are the three methods of emergency contraception?

- The emergency intrauterine device (IUD).
- An emergency contraceptive pill with the active ingredient ulipristal acetate (UPA). ellaOne is currently the only brand available in the UK.
- An emergency contraceptive pill with the hormone levonorgestrel. There are different brands, such as Levonelle.

Top tips when providing emergency contraception (EC)

- ✓ Tell women about the emergency IUD, even if you don't provide this method and make sure you can signpost them to a place that will fit it.
- ✓ Let women know that the IUD is the most effective method of emergency contraception (over 99% effective) and they can keep it as their usual method afterwards if they wish.
- ✓ If you refer a woman on for an emergency IUD, issue them with an emergency pill as well in case they don't or can't have the IUD fitted.
- ✓ Find out if a test for sexually transmitted infections is needed and signpost as appropriate.
- ✓ Consider whether post-exposure prophylaxis is necessary, and signpost as appropriate.
- ✓ Don't wait until women need EC – discuss the options when they come to get their usual method, so they're prepared in advance.
- ✓ The misleading phrase “morning after pill” is still common. Avoiding this term helps to promote women's choices accurately.
- ✓ When issuing an emergency contraceptive pill, remind women that it won't provide any ongoing protection from pregnancy.
- ✓ Ask if women are happy with their regular contraception. FPA's My Contraception Tool (www.fpa.org.uk/mycontraceptiontool) can help women think about their options.
- ✓ Consider whether it would be helpful to offer an advance supply of emergency contraception for some individuals.

Top tips for pharmacists

Pharmacies are often the first port of call when it comes to emergency contraception.

- ✓ Be aware of relevant schemes or initiatives in your area, such as those providing free emergency contraception for particular groups. And stay up to date on current guidance.
- ✓ Advertise the fact that women can have a private, non-judgemental conversation to discuss emergency contraception and wider contraceptive needs – a poster is an easy way to do this.
- ✓ During any discussion, ask open-ended questions so women feel able to talk about wider issues and concerns and ask questions.
- ✓ Make sure all staff in the pharmacy are equipped with the communication skills to deliver a friendly, easily accessible service where women are not made to feel embarrassed.
- ✓ Customers of varying ages, cultures and backgrounds have different needs. For example, older people might not have been exposed to sexual health messaging. When talking to young people be aware of associated issues like safeguarding and limits of confidentiality.

Clinical guidance

Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare clinical guidance: Emergency contraception
www.fsrh.org/documents/ceu-clinical-guidance-emergency-contraception-march-2017/

Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare clinical guidance: Quick-starting contraception
www.fsrh.org/standards-and-guidance/current-clinical-guidance/quick-starting-contraception/

Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare clinical guidance: Intrauterine contraception
www.fsrh.org/standards-and-guidance/documents/ceuguidanceintrauterinecontraception/

How FPA can help you

Our training team run courses on contraception and offer tailored training for pharmacists. www.fpa.org.uk/training

You can also order information and resources on emergency contraception and contraceptive choices, as well as on sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy choices and reproduction from www.fpa.org.uk/shop

Use our free digital resources provided as part of the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Information Programme at www.fpa.org.uk/toolkits