

Sexual Health Week 15 – 21 September 2014



Emergency contraception survey

This year's [Sexual Health Week](#) is all about emergency contraception and wider contraceptive choices. We conducted a survey to find out what women in the UK know and think about their options.

Experience

35% of sexually active women aged 16-54 had unprotected sex in the last two years when not planning a pregnancy; of these an overwhelming majority – 83% – said they did not use emergency contraception afterwards.

Of those who did use emergency contraception, 85% said they had used the emergency pill (52% - Levonelle, 6% - ellaOne, 27% - couldn't remember which pill).

Just 5% said they had an emergency IUD, also known as the coil, fitted. This is despite 46% of women surveyed saying they have a good understanding of the IUD and how it worked.

The women who did get emergency contraception were most likely to go to a pharmacy – 55%. 14% got it from a GP and 11% a contraception clinic.

Knowledge

When asked how much they thought they knew in general about emergency contraception, the majority of 16-54 year-old women said they know only 'a little' (59%). Just one-quarter said they knew a lot, 12% said they 'don't know very much', and 3% said they know 'nothing'.

43% said they did not know where they could get emergency contraception if they need it.

Just one in six (16%) they thought health professionals provide enough information on the different methods of emergency contraception that are available.

Over one-quarter of women (26%) thought under-16s have to get permission from a parent or carer to get emergency contraception.

More than one-third (36%) wrongly thought that you have to have a prescription to get any method of emergency contraception or weren't sure.

Almost two-thirds (62%) wrongly believed, or weren't sure, that emergency contraception has to be used within 24 hours of the episode of unprotected sex to be effective.

Just 17% learnt about emergency contraception – how it works and how to get it – while at school or college.

Almost two-thirds (63%) either thought repeat use of emergency hormonal contraception can make you infertile or weren't sure.

One-half (50%) wrongly thought that using emergency contraception effectively causes an abortion or weren't sure.

The methods which most women said they had a good understanding of were the male condom (75%) and combined pill (72%). Least well-known were the contraceptive patch (24%), IUS (15%) and vaginal ring (10%).

Attitudes

76% disagreed that using emergency contraception meant a woman had been irresponsible with her contraception and / or taken a risk.

Despite this, more than one-third (39%) of women surveyed thought asking for emergency contraception can be embarrassing and there is still a stigma around it. This was particularly felt among 16-24-year-olds (52%).

18% said they would like to be able to keep emergency contraceptive pills at home in case they need them. However, just 4% of women said they had bought or asked for emergency contraceptive pills to do this.

This was highest among 16-24-year-olds, with one-third (33%) saying they would like to keep a supply at home. But only 3% had asked.

Notes: Survey of 2509 UK women aged 16 to 54, of which 2131 have ever been sexually active. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Fieldwork was undertaken between 22 and 25 July 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

We have results for individual Government regions and for the age groups 16-24, 25-39 and 40-54. Please email press@fpa.org.uk for this data.

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