

Emergency Contraception (EC) After Sexual Assault

Hospitals in Pennsylvania that provide emergency services to sexual assault victims are required to talk to you about emergency contraception (sometimes called the “morning after pill” or “day after pill”), tell you it is available, explain its effectiveness and side effects, and give it to you if you ask for it unless there is a medical reason not to take it.

Hospitals that have a religious or moral objection to providing EC are required to talk with you about EC and arrange to transport you, at no cost, to a location where you can obtain EC if you request it.

Key Facts for Survivors About Emergency Contraception

- EC is back-up birth control that lowers your risk of getting pregnant after sexual assault.
- EC can work up to five days after unprotected sex, but it works best when you take it as soon as possible.
- EC is safe and effective.
- Millions have safely used EC to prevent unintended pregnancies for over 40 years.
- EC does not harm an existing pregnancy.
- EC does not affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- EC can lower your chance of getting pregnant by 75-90 percent.

How Emergency Contraception Works

- EC prevents an egg from leaving the ovary or by keeping the sperm away from the egg. EC may also work by preventing fertilization of the egg.
- EC is **not** the abortion pill, and it will not end an existing pregnancy or cause an abortion or miscarriage.

Side effects of Emergency Contraception may include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Breast tenderness
- Headache
- Dizziness

If you vomit within two hours of taking EC, call a healthcare provider. You may have to take the pill again.

Although your chances of pregnancy as a result of sexual assault will be greatly reduced if you take EC, you may want to make an appointment with your health care provider to provide a pregnancy test in about two weeks. If your period is more than one week late, you may be pregnant. Contact a healthcare provider for a follow-up appointment.

Two types of emergency contraception pills are approved for use by the Food and Drug Administration, and an IUD option.

1. Progestin-Only Pills (Examples: Plan B One-Step and Next Choice One Dose):

- Works best when taken within three days of unprotected sex but can still help to prevent pregnancy up to five days after unprotected sex
- Available at pharmacies without a prescription, regardless of age

2. Ulipristal Acetate (ella):

- Works best when taken within five days of unprotected sex
- Should not be taken by women who are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Is only available with a prescription

Weight and EC

EC pills may be less effective in obese women (body mass index is more than 30 kg/m²). Consult a healthcare provider as needed.

3. Copper-T IUD (Paragard):

- The most effective form of EC, reducing the risk of pregnancy by more than 99% when inserted in the uterus by a healthcare provider within 5 days of unprotected intercourse
- Works regardless of a person's weight
- Not readily available in the Emergency Department setting and requires an appointment with an OB/GYN after you leave the emergency department

Important Information

DON'T WAIT! Take EC as soon as possible after unprotected sex

To fully protect yourself after using EC, back up your regular birth control method with another method such as condoms for seven days.

EC does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections. A condom is recommended to be used for protection against these infections.

Check with your treating healthcare provider or pharmacist to discuss any concerns regarding drug interactions. Ask what medication you received or look at your patient discharge instructions.

Paying for Emergency Contraception:

Pennsylvania's Victims Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP) can cover the cost of EC when you receive it during the rape exam. Talk to the advocate from the rape crisis center for more information on VCAP or call the program at 1-800-233-2339 or go to www.pccd.pa.gov/Victim-Services.

For support and information, at any time, day or night, contact your local rape crisis center at 888-772-7227 or go to <https://pcar.org/help-pa/locations>.

Additional Resources:

Office of Population Research, Princeton University: <http://ec.Princeton.edu>

PA Coalition Against Rape: <http://www.pcar.org/pregnancy>

World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/emergency-contraception>

Kaiser Family Foundation:

<https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/fact-sheet/emergency-contraception/>

Sources: Oregon Health Authority, Massachusetts Department of Public Health,
Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health, Kaiser Family
Foundation