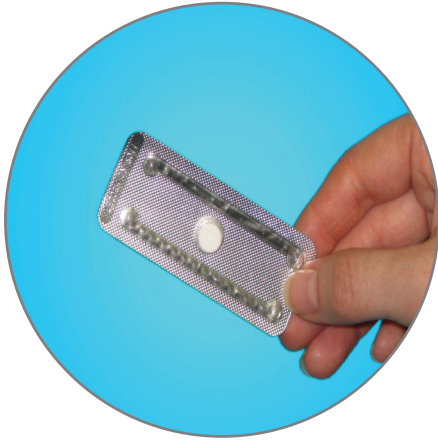


Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception is used to reduce the risk of pregnancy. The most common type is the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (previously called the 'morning after pill').



What is it?

Emergency contraception can be used to reduce the risk of pregnancy when:

- Sex has occurred without contraception
- Contraception may have failed eg missed pill(s) or condom breakage
- Sexual assault has occurred

There are two types of emergency contraception:

1. Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)
2. Intrauterine Device (IUD). This may be appropriate if you are planning to use an IUD for future contraception and it is less than 5 days since you had unprotected sex. Please see a doctor for more information.

How does it work?

ECP contains a progestogen-only hormone (levonorgestrel) which is taken as a single dose.

ECP prevents pregnancy in several ways. If the dose is taken before the woman ovulates (releases an egg) it can delay ovulation. The hormones in ECP may also affect the movement of sperm and egg in the uterus and fallopian tubes, and possibly the lining of the uterus.

Who can take ECP?

Any woman of any age can take ECP, even women who cannot take the combined contraceptive pill because they get migraines or have had a thrombosis (blood clot). There is no legal age limit in WA to obtain ECP.

There is no evidence to suggest any long term effects from multiple use of ECP. However, it is not a recommended method of regular contraception as it is less effective than other readily available contraceptive methods.

Does ECP always prevent a pregnancy?

ECP is most effective at preventing pregnancy when taken within 24 hours of having unprotected sex (the sooner it is taken the more effective it is).

ECP is sometimes incorrectly referred to as the 'morning after pill', when in fact it can be taken up to 5 days after unprotected sex. The effectiveness of ECP decreases as time passes and is significantly reduced beyond 3 days (72 hours) afterwards.

ECP is more likely to fail under any of the following circumstances:

- Delay in taking the dose
- You vomit within two hours of taking the dose
- You have unprotected sex again after taking the dose

If you do become pregnant despite taking ECP there is no medical evidence that the pregnancy will be affected.

Practicing safe sex reduces the risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs)



Where do you purchase ECP?

ECP is available over the counter at most pharmacies. Some pharmacies may not supply ECP or may refuse to sell it to you. If you are having difficulty locating a pharmacy contact FPWA or Quarry Health Centre. The cost of ECP varies depending on where you purchase it.

Before you can be given ECP, the pharmacist will ask you some questions to check if it is suitable for you. The information you share is confidential and you should be taken to a quiet area to discuss this. The following are examples of questions you may be asked:

- Is ECP for you to use?
- Your age
- When did you have unprotected sex?
- When was your last period?
- Do you suffer from any medical conditions?
- Are you currently taking any medications (including herbal)?

Possible side effects of ECP

Side effects from ECP usually disappear within 48 hours and require no treatment.

- Breast tenderness or pain
- Mild headaches
- Nausea
- Tiredness
- Dizziness
- Spot bleeding

See FPWA or a doctor if you have any concerns.

When to expect your period

Most women have a period at about the expected time but it may be a little late or a little early. If your period is over one week late or you notice any difference in your period, do a pregnancy test or see a doctor.

What if I am already pregnant when I take ECP?

ECP will not be effective if a fertilised egg has already embedded itself into the lining of the uterus. ECP does not cause an abortion and there is no medical evidence to suggest that ECP has any affect on an existing pregnancy.

Ectopic pregnancy

An ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy that develops outside the uterus, usually in a fallopian tube) is a rare but possible complication of any pregnancy. This is a serious condition that needs urgent medical attention. For this reason, if you get unusual pain in the lower abdomen you need to see a doctor (local general practice, FPWA, King Edward Memorial Hospital or the nearest hospital emergency department).

Ongoing contraception

ECP is not a recommended method of regular contraception. If you have no regular method of contraception, visit a doctor or FPWA to discuss methods that may be suitable for you. If you choose to use a hormonal contraceptive, it can be started soon after you take ECP.

Emergency contraception does not protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs). If you have had unprotected sex you should get tested for STIs by a doctor or at FPWA.

FPWA Sexual Health Services
70 Roe Street, Northbridge, WA 6003
Ph 08 9227 6177
info@fpwa.org.au

Quarry Health Centre for under 25s
7 Quarry Street, Fremantle, WA, 6160
Ph 08 9430 4544
quarry@fpwa.org.au

Sexual Health Helpline
Metro 08 9227 6178
Country 1800 198 205
sexhelp@fpwa.org.au