

# Emergency Contraception: Here's What to Know

Most sexual health educators feel well-equipped to handle discussions around birth control methods, but emergency contraception is frequently left out of the conversation as a safe and valid option to prevent unplanned pregnancy.

Due to this, there can still be stigma around using emergency contraception, as well as general misconceptions about the method itself.

Without proper education and honest conversations, these feelings around emergency contraceptives can be perpetuated.

Keep reading to gain some solid tips on navigating how to talk about emergency contraception with young people!

## What is Emergency Contraception (EC)?

Emergency contraception is a pregnancy prevention method that is used after unprotected sexual intercourse, when a primary form of contraception is unavailable, or if the method fails.

Emergency contraception is an oral medication used to prevent pregnancy up to five days after unprotected sex. It does not terminate existing pregnancies. The sooner EC is taken, the higher likelihood there is to prevent a pregnancy. EC works by delaying the ovulation phase during a menstrual cycle and thickens cervical mucus to prevent sperm cells to fertilize an egg cell.



*Estimated read time: 4 minutes*

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## When should people use Emergency Contraception (EC)?

EC should be used if:

- Birth control was not used prior to or during sexual intercourse.
- Birth control was used incorrectly during vaginal intercourse (ex: the condom breaking during intercourse, a missed pill, forgetting to change the patch or the ring, or not getting the shot on time)
- If they were forced to have unprotected sex

## Tips for Talking to Teens about Emergency Contraception

### 1. Emphasize the facts.

Explain that EC works by delaying ovulation and preventing fertilization of the egg with a sperm cell. [It does NOT harm existing pregnancies, nor does it affect fertility in the future.](#)

### 2. Let them know that time is of the essence.

The sooner it is taken the more effective it is at preventing pregnancy.

### 3. Explain the difference between an abortion pill and EC.

[Emergency contraception does not terminate a pregnancy.](#) Abortion access varies state by state, and emergency contraception does not have the same restrictions.

### 4. Emergency contraception does not prevent STIs.

STIs are transmitted via oral, vaginal, penile, or anal fluid exchange. Since it is not a barrier method, emergency contraception doesn't help with that.



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## 5. EC is not designed to be a primary form of birth control.

There are [several options](#) that are less expensive and much more effective than using emergency contraception on a consistent basis.

## 6. Be affirming about the choice to use emergency contraception.

Using language that normalizes using emergency contraception helps to decrease stigma around using it. There is nothing wrong with needing to take an emergency contraceptive method if the goal is to prevent unplanned pregnancy.

## 7. Integrate it into your lesson about contraceptive methods

This is most commonly done after explaining each birth control method to help teens understand what their options are if the method fails or was unavailable.

## 8. Ensure to breakdown information regarding cost and accessibility.

More on that below!

## What are the types of emergency contraception?

### Levonorgestrel

Common Levonorgestrel EC brands include: Plan-B One Step, MyWay, Option2, My Choice, and more. These are the types of emergency contraception people usually think about.

- It is taken in pill format and can be found at the drug store without a prescription.
- The brand of EC or how much it costs [does not affect how the pill works](#). The active ingredient, levonorgestrel, being present is what matters most to prevent a pregnancy.
- Depending on the brand, the cost for a levonorgestrel pill can currently range between \$10-50.

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- Follow the instructions on the box on how to take it, because each pill may be different. This type of EC can be taken up to five days after unprotected sex, but is most effective when taken as soon as possible, preferably within three days.
- This type of pill is less effective if the person taking it weighs more than 165 pounds. If that is the case, there are other options.

## Ulipristal Acetate

The brand name version of this EC is called *ella* and requires a prescription from a healthcare provider.

- Without insurance, [it currently costs around \\$50](#). Depending on the type of health insurance, this type of emergency contraception may be fully or partially covered.
- It can be taken within a five-day period after unprotected vaginal sex.
- It works best for individuals that weigh between 165–195 pounds.

## Copper IUD

Getting an Intrauterine device (IUD) within five days of having unprotected sex works as a form of emergency contraception and is [99% effective in preventing pregnancy](#).

- The Copper IUD works by repelling sperm cells and is a non-hormonal form of birth control.
- Getting an IUD requires a doctor's visit, so it may be less accessible, but calling different healthcare providers and explaining this method is for EC may speed things along.
- This method can be used by anyone of any weight.
- Without insurance, the IUD can cost up to \$1000. Depending on the type of health insurance, this type of emergency contraception may be fully or partially covered.

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## Additional Resources at ETR

ETR is here to support your work in improving adolescent health. Check out our offerings!

**Educator Training:** check out [available trainings for educators](#) and other youth-serving professionals on implementing sexual health education programs.

**Health curriculum:** view [the evidence-based and evidence informed](#) sexual health offered through ETR.

**Birth Control and Pregnancy Prevention Resources:** Check out our offerings on [educational birth control content!](#)

**Check out:** our [new tip sheet](#) on talking about over-the-counter birth control with teens.

**3 in 30 Events:** take a deep dive into our [on-demand video resources](#) that feature discussions on topics to further adolescent health in 30 minutes or less!

Looking for something else? Contact us at [customerservice@etr.org](mailto:customerservice@etr.org)

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