



Durham Region Health Department
Facts about...



Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)

What is it?

The emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) (e.g. Plan B) is used to prevent pregnancy. ECP is also known as the “morning after pill”. It is most effective if used within three days (72 hours) after unprotected sex. Unprotected sex may include forgetting to take your birth control pill, a birth control patch or ring removed too early or put on too late, not using birth control at all, condom breakage or leakage, or for a victim of sexual assault. ECP is intended for occasional use only, not as a regular method of birth control.

How does it work?

ECP works to stop the ovaries from releasing an egg and may stop the sperm and egg from meeting. It will not work and should not be taken if you are already pregnant, or if you think you are. ECP is not an abortion pill and will not harm a pregnancy.

How effective is it?

It is hard to determine exactly how effective ECP is because there are many factors that can change the baseline risk of becoming pregnant. However, it lowers the chance of becoming pregnant by at least 50%. The sooner ECP is taken, the more effective it is. ECP should be taken within 72 hours but is less effective the longer you wait. Use of ECP may be less effective in patients with increasing body weight or body mass index (BMI). ECP should be taken as soon as possible after unprotected sex, regardless of body weight or BMI.

What are the side effects of this method?

ECP can sometimes cause nausea, vomiting, fatigue, breast tenderness, headache, abdominal pain, and diarrhea. ECP can also cause changes to your next menstrual period.

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905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



What are the effects on breastfeeding?

- ECP is safe to use when breastfeeding as only a small amount of the drug enters the breastmilk.
- If you are currently breastfeeding and use ECP you should follow up with your health care provider to discuss your contraception options.

You should know...

- If you have had unprotected sex and you already know that you do not want to get pregnant, ECP can prevent unplanned pregnancies if used as soon as possible.
- A high body weight (a body mass index (BMI) greater than 25) may decrease the effectiveness of these pills, so it is a good idea to speak with a health care professional to make sure these pills are the right choice for you.
- If you vomit within two hours of taking ECP, contact your health care provider. You will need to take another dose.
- If your period is late more than one week from when it was due, you should take a pregnancy test.
- ECP does not protect against HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Practice safe sex and always use a condom with lubricant when having oral, vaginal, or anal sex.

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