

# tool kit for teen care

## Emergency Contraception



### What is emergency contraception?

- Emergency contraception is the use of pills that can prevent a pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of having unprotected sex.
- These pills have often been called morning-after pills, but this name is misleading because the pills are effective for at least 3 days (72 hours) after having unprotected sex.
- Emergency contraception can be used after sex if contraceptives were not used, contraception failed (eg, a condom broke or slipped), contraception was used incorrectly (eg, a contraceptive injection was missed, 2 or more birth control pills were missed), or sexual assault (rape) occurred.

### What types of emergency contraception are available?

- In the United States, there are three common ways to get emergency contraception:
  1. A prescription for Plan B®, which contains a hormone called progestin.
    - It requires patients to take two doses 12 hours apart.
    - Since nausea is less common and Plan B appears to be slightly more effective than the methods described in Table 1, many health care practitioners favor this medication.
  2. A prescription for a kit with four pills containing the hormones estrogen and progestin prepared specifically for emergency contraception (Preven®).
    - Preven® contains the same steroid hormones that are in the birth control pills. Therefore teens should take medicine to prevent nausea 30 minutes to an hour before taking these pills.
    - Preven® contains 2 doses of medicine that should be taken 12 hours apart.
  3. A specific number (depending on the brand) of birth control pills that contain the hormones estrogen and progestin as listed in Table 1. A health care practitioner prescribes these pills.
    - Because nausea is common, it is recommended that teens take a medicine for nausea 30 minutes to an hour before taking these pills.

### How does emergency contraception work?

- The main way emergency contraception works is by either interrupting or delaying ovulation (release of an egg) so it can not be fertilized. This accounts for approximately 80% of the effectiveness of emergency contraception.
- Emergency contraception does NOT work once the fertilized egg is attached to the lining of the uterus (ie, once pregnant). It also does not harm a pregnancy.

### How well does emergency contraception work?

- Emergency contraception is very effective and can prevent approximately 75–80% of pregnancies that would have happened otherwise. In other words, if 8 women would have gotten pregnant and they took emergency contraception only 2 of them would get pregnant.

### When is it appropriate to use emergency contraception?

- Teens should consider using emergency contraception if they:
  - Had intercourse without using any protection, with inadequate protection, or without using protection correctly. This includes couples using the withdrawal method, which is very ineffective.
  - Used a condom, but it broke or slipped.
  - Missed a contraceptive injection (shot) or 2 or more birth control pills from a pack of pills.
  - Were forced to have sex (raped).
- In each of these circumstances, teens should call their health care practitioner, contact a health center or family planning clinic, or call an emergency room to get emergency contraception. It is important to take the first dose of medicine within 72 hours of having unprotected or inadequately protected sex.
- Some offices and clinics will treat patients over the telephone; this is more likely to be the case if the teen is a regular patient. Other offices and clinics require the teen to come in for an office visit.
- Some physicians will provide advance prescriptions for emergency contraception so you can have immediate access to the pills. Individuals should consider talking with their physicians about this option.
- It does not matter where a teen is in her menstrual cycle; if she meets any of the circumstances listed above, emergency contraception is appropriate to prevent an unwanted pregnancy.



# tool kit for teen care

**Table 1. Birth Control Pills Used for Emergency Contraception**

Use as soon as possible, but within 72 hours after unprotected or inadequately protected intercourse.

Brand *	1st Dose (number of pills to swallow as soon as possible, but within 72 hours, after unprotected or incompletely protected intercourse)	2nd Dose—12 hours after 1st dose (Number of pills to swallow)	Nausea medication recommended
Plan B® (dedicated product)	1 white pill	1 white pill	No
Preven® (dedicated product)	2 blue pills	2 blue pills	Yes
Allesse	5 pink pills	5 pink pills	Yes
Aviane	5 orange pills	5 orange pills	Yes
Levlen	4 light-orange pills	4 light-orange pills	Yes
Levlite	5 pink pills	5 pink pills	Yes
Levora	4 white pills	4 white pills	Yes
Low-Ogestrel	4 white pills	4 white pills	Yes
Lo/Ovral	4 white pills	4 white pills	Yes
Nordette	4 light-orange pills	4 light-orange pills	Yes
Ogestrel	2 white pills	2 white pills	Yes
Ovral	2 white pills	2 white pills	Yes
Ovrett	20 yellow pills	20 yellow pills	No
Tri-Levlen	4 yellow pills	4 yellow pills	Yes
Triphasil	4 yellow pills	4 yellow pills	Yes
Trivora	4 pink pills	4 pink pills	Yes

There may be other oral contraceptive pills that are not listed here that provide the proper hormonal content needed for emergency contraception.

## Are there any problems to consider?

- Emergency contraception should not be relied on as an ongoing birth control method. It is not as effective as many ongoing methods, such as birth control pills.
- Emergency contraception offers no protection against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including chlamydia, gonorrhea, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). For this reason, teens should also see their health practitioner to get tested for STDs after unprotected sex and when they have any change in sexual partners.
- Emergency contraception only protects a woman for a short time and will not protect her for the rest of her menstrual cycle. It is critical to use a barrier method of contraception and disease protection, such as a condom, if she has sex again, even if she is using birth control pills.
- Teens who use emergency contraception should talk about their long-term birth control needs with their medical practitioner.
- Use of emergency contraception often affects the menstrual cycle.

- Women who use emergency contraception may have their periods earlier or later than expected.
- If no period has occurred within 21 days of taking emergency contraception, then the teen should see her health care practitioner to be sure she isn't pregnant.

## For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

List of pharmacies that stock emergency contraception  
[www.gotoPlanB.com](http://www.gotoPlanB.com)

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
 409 12th Street SW  
 PD Box 96920  
 Washington, DC 20090-6290  
 Telephone: (202) 863-2579  
 Fax: (202) 484-3917  
[www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

American Society for Emergency Contraception  
 PO Box 1496  
 Princeton, NJ 08542  
 Telephone: (609) 258-2661  
 E-mail: [AmSocEC@aol.com](mailto:AmSocEC@aol.com)

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals  
 2401 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
 Suite 350  
 Washington, DC 20037-1718  
 Telephone: (202) 466-3825  
 Fax: (202) 466-3826  
 E-mail: [arhp@arhp.org](mailto:arhp@arhp.org)  
[www.arhp.org](http://www.arhp.org)

AWARE Foundation  
 1015 Chestnut Street  
 Suite 1225  
 Philadelphia, PA 19107-4302  
 Telephone: (215) 955-9847  
[www.awarefoundation.org](http://www.awarefoundation.org)

The Emergency Contraception Hotline  
 Telephone: 888-NOT-2-LATE  
[www.not-2-late.com](http://www.not-2-late.com)

Go Ask Alice!  
 Columbia University Health Service  
[www.goaskalice.columbia.edu](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu)

National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association  
 1627 K Street NW, 12th Floor  
 Washington, DC 20006  
 Telephone: (202) 293-3114  
 Fax: (202) 293-1990  
[www.nfprha.org/facts](http://www.nfprha.org/facts)

Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
 810 Seventh Avenue  
 New York, NY 10019  
 Telephone: (212) 541-7800  
 Fax: (212) 245-1845  
[www.plannedparenthood.org/ec](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/ec)

Sex, Etc.  
 Network for Family Life Education  
 Rutgers University  
[www.sxetc.org](http://www.sxetc.org)

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States  
 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 350  
 New York, NY 10036-7802  
 Telephone: (212) 819-9770  
 Fax: (212) 819-9776  
[www.siecus.org](http://www.siecus.org)

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada  
[www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)