

## Emergency Contraception

### What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception is a type of birth control that is taken either orally as a pill or by having an Intrauterine Device (IUD) inserted into your uterus after unprotected sex. The pill is also known as the Emergency Contraceptive Pill or "ECP" and contains the hormone progestin.

Emergency contraception can be used:

- After sex without birth control
- If birth control fails (such as a broken condom)
- Missed or late birth control pills, patch, ring or shot
- After sexual assault that could result in pregnancy



### How does emergency contraception work?

Emergency contraception may stop or delay the ovaries from releasing an egg, the sperm from meeting an egg, or the egg from attaching to the wall of the uterus. You should not use emergency contraception if you know you are pregnant as it will not stop the pregnancy. If you are already pregnant the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) will not harm the fetus nor cause an abortion or miscarriage.

## Option 1 - Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)

### How effective is ECP?

ECP reduces the chance of pregnancy by approximately 60%.

### Timing is important!

The sooner you take ECP after unprotected sex, the better. It will work best if taken within 24 hours, but can be taken up to 5 days after unprotected sex. The longer you wait after you have sex, the less effective it is.

ECP does not work as well as other birth control methods, so it is not recommended as your only form of birth control.

### Advantages

- Easy and safe to take
- Free and accessible at multiple locations

ECP will not protect you from pregnancy if you have unprotected sex **after** you take it.

### Disadvantages

- May make your period irregular for a month afterwards
- Some users may experience mild side effects:
  - Nausea & vomiting. If you throw up within one hour of taking ECP, you need to take it again
  - Breast tenderness, headache, stomach pain, fatigue, dizziness

### How do you use ECP?

- Take ECP as soon as you can after unprotected sex.
- If you do not have a period within 3 weeks of taking ECP, you should get a pregnancy test.
- It is safe to take ECP every time you have unprotected sex.

### Where can you get ECP?

- Sexual health clinics & community health centres - free. *Ask for a nurse to help you with ECP. Call ahead to confirm a nurse is available to help you.*
- Pharmacies - free. *Ask to speak to a pharmacist. No prescription is needed.*
- Some walk-in clinics.

## Option 2 - Emergency Contraception - Intrauterine Device (IUD)

### How effective is the IUD as an emergency contraceptive method?

The IUD can be inserted into your uterus up to 7 days after unprotected sex with an effectiveness of over 99%.

The IUD can remain in place, and you will have good contraception for 5-8 years (length of time depends on product used). IUDs can be removed easily by your health care provider.

The IUD as a form of emergency contraception is over 99% effective

### Advantages

- The most effective form of emergency contraception available
- Highly effective form of ongoing birth control
- Easy to use, long-lasting birth control

### Disadvantages

- Requires a visit to a health care provider for insertion and removal
- May have temporary side effect of spotting until periods stop
- May have more cramping and heavier periods (Copper IUD only)

### How do you access the IUD as a form of emergency contraception?

An IUD must be inserted by a qualified health care professional. VCH sexual health clinics offer IUD insertions and removals. Alternatives include Options for Sexual Health clinics or your health care provider. IUDs are provided free if you have MSP.

For a list of providers, you can visit [www.emergencyiud.com](http://www.emergencyiud.com) or call Sex Sense at 1-800-739-7367

You should not use emergency contraception if you know you are pregnant. It will not work. Emergency contraception will not harm the fetus nor cause an abortion.

### Emergency contraception DOES NOT protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

*STI testing is recommended every 6-12 months and/or when you have a new partner(s). STI testing is available at a sexual health clinic or with your health care provider.*

### Questions?

If you have questions about emergency contraception, call your health care provider, sexual health clinic, pharmacy, or 1-800-SEX-SENSE.

### Find the clinic closest to you:

<https://www.vch.ca/en/service/sexual-health-clinics>

[www.optionsforsexualhealth.org](http://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org)



This fact sheet contains general information and should not be used in place of individual consultation with a qualified healthcare provider.