

# Emergency Contraception – PLAN B®



## What is it?

The Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP, aka “morning after pill”) can be used by a woman to reduce the risk of pregnancy occurring after unprotected vaginal intercourse. ECP is branded in Canada as Plan B, Next Choice, Norolevo and Option 2. Plan B is the brand of ECP that is used at YCDC and Community Health Centres.

ECP can be taken after unprotected vaginal intercourse or a known or suspected birth control failure (such as condom breakage/leakage, missed pills). It contains the hormone progestin (levonorgestrel). ECP is most effective if you take it as soon as possible after unprotected intercourse but can be used up to 120 hours (5 days) to prevent pregnancy. ECP is not an ‘abortion pill’ and does not work if you are already pregnant.

⇒ **Plan B® is for emergency/back up use only. Plan B should not replace a regular contraceptive method.**

⇒ **With a risk of pregnancy comes a risk of sexually transmitted infections. Counseling and testing are available.**

## How does it work?

You must take ECP within 5 days of unprotected intercourse. It works in one of these ways:

- delays your ovaries from releasing an egg
- prevents fertilization of egg by sperm (the sperm and eggs meeting)

## How effective is it?

ECP is effective at reducing the risk of pregnancy by up to 89%. ECP may not work if:

- an egg has already been fertilized before taking the pills
- too much time went by between unprotected intercourse and taking the pills
- unprotected intercourse occurs again after taking the pills, especially before your period comes (i.e. abstain or begin an effective contraceptive method immediately)
- your weight is 75 kg (165lbs) or greater (see below)

## How do I use it?

1. Take the two white pills together as soon as possible, within 5 days of unprotected intercourse. The sooner it is taken the more effective it is, with best rates if taken within 72 hours.
2. Plan B usually causes less nausea than other ECPs which contain estrogen. However, if you do feel nauseous, it is usually mild and should go away within a day. You can take an anti-nausea medication (such as Dimenhydrinate, or Gravol®). If you do vomit, a replacement dose is not necessary unless it has been less than one hour since you took the pills.
3. You may experience spotting after taking ECP.
4. You should begin your period within 3 weeks of taking Plan B. If you still haven't had a period after 21 days, return to the clinic for a pregnancy test.

## Who should not use ECP?

It is important to talk to your health care provider before taking Plan B if any of the following apply to you:

- pregnancy – ECP will not be effective if you are already pregnant
- allergy to any component of the drug
- unusual vaginal bleeding that has not been diagnosed

## Can ECP harm a fetus?

There is no evidence that ECP would harm a pregnant woman or the developing fetus if the product were accidentally taken during early pregnancy.

## Are there side effects?

ECP may cause minor side effects such as:

- nausea
- dizziness
- abdominal pain
- breast tenderness
- fatigue
- menstrual changes – i.e. your period may come a few days earlier or later than expected.
- headache

## Keep in mind...

- If you have purchased ECP in advance of need, be sure to check the expiry date before you use it
- ECP does not provide protection from sexually transmitted infections (STI) such as HIV or Chlamydia. Appropriate condom use is the best way to avoid contracting or spreading an STI
- ECP will not protect you from pregnancy if you have unprotected intercourse after you take it
- You can start to use a reliable, on-going method of birth control if you would like to prevent pregnancy
- ECP will not work if you are already pregnant
- A pregnancy test is advised if you do not get your period by 21 days after taking ECP

## ECP and Body Weight

Health Canada advises that levonorgestrel emergency contraceptive pills (eg Plan B) are not as effective for women weighing 75 kg (165 lbs) and greater and are not effective for women over 80 kg (176 lbs)

- a copper IUD is very effective (99%) for emergency contraception, regardless of a person's weight, and can be inserted up to 7 days after unprotected intercourse, but ideally as soon as possible
- Plan B is still recommended, regardless of your weight, in case you cannot get an IUD inserted for any reason