



EC OTC: For Reproductive Freedom Demand Emergency Contraception Over the Counter

What is Emergency Contraception (EC)?

- Emergency contraceptive pills safely and effectively prevent pregnancy in cases of unprotected intercourse, birth control failure, and sexual assault.
- EC pills consist of high doses of birth control hormones. The hormones in EC pills can delay or prevent ovulation, interfere with fertilization, and alter the uterine lining to inhibit implantation of a fertilized egg.
- There are two kinds of pre-packaged EC pills available by prescription in the US — Plan B[®] and Preven[™].

Emergency Contraception Essential to Women's Lives

- Emergency contraceptive pills have the potential to cut in half the number of unintended pregnancies in the United States and prevent as many as 800,000 abortions a year.
- EC is an important backup method of birth control and substantially increases women's control over their reproductive health and lives.

What Does the Term Over-the-Counter Mean?

- The FDA (Federal Drug Administration) is responsible for regulating and approving new drugs. Upon approval, the FDA can specify that drugs be distributed by prescription only or over-the-counter.
- Drugs that can be safely and effectively distributed without a prescription and that can be sold at any drugstore or retail outlet are labeled over-the-counter.
- A third option for distribution, which is less common, is called behind-the-counter status. Behind-the-counter drugs are available without a prescription but patients must obtain the drug from a specially-trained pharmacist. Currently, EC is available behind-the-counter only in California, Washington, and Alaska. In all the rest of the states, EC requires a prescription.

EC Must Be Available to Women Over-the-Counter

- Currently, emergency contraception is only available to most American women by prescription. The prescription only requirement imposes needless and harmful burdens on women's access to emergency contraception.
- EC pills are **time sensitive** – the first dose of EC must be taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex and EC is most effective when taken within **24 hours**. As doctors' offices and clinics tend to be closed on week-ends and in the evenings, which is when unprotected sex is more likely to occur, it is often extremely difficult for women to access a prescription within the limited 72 hour time-frame.
- Due to this small window of time and EC's potential to greatly reduce the number of unintended pregnancies, it is imperative that women have access to EC over-the-counter.

Can Women Use EC Safely Without a Prescription?

- Yes. Women can use emergency contraceptive pills safely and effectively without the aid of a physician or pharmacist. In fact, according to the American Medical Women's Association, prescription status is "medically unwarranted."
- EC meets all of the FDA's requirements for over-the-counter status and is generally safer than many other drugs currently available over-the-counter in the US.
- Over-the-counter status of emergency contraception is supported by a wide-range of medical and women's health organizations, including the American Medical Association, American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, National Women's Health Network, and National Black Women's Health Project.
- EC is currently available without a prescription in many countries worldwide, including France, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Portugal, Israel, and South Africa.

Take Action to Make Emergency Contraception Available Over-the-Counter!

In February of 2001, more than 70 organizations, including the Feminist Majority Foundation, submitted a joint petition to the FDA demanding that emergency contraception be approved for over-the-counter use. Since then, the Women's Capital Corporation, the manufacturer of Plan B[®], has applied to the FDA to change the distribution status of Plan B[®] from prescription to over-the-counter. FMF's Campus Program has launched a major campaign to petition the FDA to make emergency contraception available over-the-counter. Join the campaign today by educating your campus about EC and organizing a petition drive to the FDA. Use FMF's national petition to collect signatures and then mail the petitions in to us so we can deliver them in bulk to the FDA! Visit FeministCampus.org/PrescribeChoice/ecotc.asp to the download petition today!