

Contraceptive agents

Emergency contraception sales fall by more than 50% as pandemic causes 'disruption' to sexual health services

The Pharmaceutical Journal | 29 JUN 2020 | By Julia Robinson

Morning after pill sales fell by more than 20,000 units between March and April 2020, says retail data provider IRI.

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A parliamentary enquiry revealed the COVID-19 pandemic had caused "significant disruption" to contraceptive services in the UK

Sales of the morning after pill dropped by more than 50% between March 2020 and April 2020, according to retail data provider IRI.

This comes as a response to a parliamentary inquiry into sexual health services from the [Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health \(FSRH\)](#) and [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists \(RCOG\)](#), which revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused "significant disruption" to contraceptive services in the UK. It also recommended that pharmacist consultations should not be "a barrier" to patients receiving emergency contraception when needed.

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The IRI figures, which were shared with *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, show that during March 2020, 38,553 units of emergency contraception were sold by pharmacies, at a cost of £834,828. However, during April 2020, sales dropped by over 20,000 to 18,501 units, at a cost of £409,982. Figures remained reduced during May 2020 with 23,917 sales recorded in that month.

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In a joint response to the cross-party group on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) inquiry into access to contraception, published on 22 June 2020, the FSRH and RCOG highlighted survey results that revealed that 12% of SRH service providers had ended or limited the provision of emergency oral contraception during the pandemic.

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The FSRH and RCOG said "all individuals" should have access to free emergency contraception "at time and place of need"

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"Though consultations with pharmacists are recommended and best practice, a consultation should not be a barrier to receiving emergency contraception," the response said.

Separately, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) has called for emergency hormonal contraception to be reclassified as a general sales list medication so that it can be sold without the need for a consultation.

"This would ensure women could buy the medication directly from the shelf from pharmacies and other locations where medicines are sold without the need for a face-to-face consultation with a pharmacist, which may be impossible to conduct while also observing social-distancing measures," said Katherine O'Brien, associate director of communications and campaigns at BPAS.

However, Sandra Gidley, president of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said that having a discussion with a pharmacist was a "key part" of emergency contraception provision.

"A consultation supports a woman to consider her future use of contraception, her risk of having a sexually transmitted infection and help with any other sexual health questions she may have.

"The ongoing requirement for a consultation and the classification of emergency contraception as a P medicine is a matter for the medicines regulator and marketing authorisation holders."

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