Lockdown saw access to morning after pill fall significantly, figures suggest

Katherine O'Brien, from BPAS, said: “It is unclear if the lockdown will lead to a baby boom during which more women may become pregnant, but it is inevitable that women will be more vulnerable to unplanned pregnancy and at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections if they are not seen by specialists or by their family doctor due to the current situation in healthcare services.”

The proportion was the same among those who are 20 years old and 29 years old, whether they were in the US or the UK. The younger women were more likely to be affected by their local government lockdowns.

% of women who had taken contraceptive pill

19% 20% 21% 22% 23% 24% 25% 26% 27% 28% 29% 30%

“However, we should make sure that these changes are made in a way that is not discriminatory to people,” she advised.

‘Up to chance’

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) welcomes the law change and says that emergency contraception should be available to women in a wider range of settings. This is the only time that the agency has recommended emergency contraception in a non-clinical setting.

“Removing barriers to this treatment is now more important than ever with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic,” said Dr Ed May, a pharmacist in Winchester and advisor for morning after pill brand Up to chance.

“Emergency contraception is accessible at pharmacies, community health and family planning centres and in other settings where women are more likely to be suffering from long-term mental health issues in England and in other parts of the world. It is unclear if the lockdown will lead to a baby boom during which more women may become pregnant, but is inevitable that women will be more vulnerable to unplanned pregnancy and at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections if they are not seen by specialists or by their family doctor due to the current situation in healthcare services.”

Emergency contraception is available for free from GP surgeries and walk-in-clinics in England. The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) wants a law change to make the morning-after pill easier to access in this situation. The law has already been temporarily changed to allow women who know they are pregnant to access morning-after pill from pharmacies.

‘Unplanned pregnancies could rise’

The Advisory Group on Contraception has warned most surgeries stopped offering emergency contraception and that most surgeries have stopped offering the service due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. A survey of members suggests 77% of GPs and 64% of specialists have stopped offering the service.

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The figure rose slightly in May to 23,918.

Retail data show sales fell by 50% from March to April, while NHS prescriptions for emergency contraception have fallen in the UK by 20%.

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