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THREE QUESTIONS

The morning after pill will soon be free in France. Is the Netherlands lagging behind the rest of Europe?

All women in France will soon be able to get the morning after pill for free. Costs should not be a reason to take emergency contraception or not, according to the French cabinet. Is France leading the way?

Joram Bollea September 21, 2022 , 5:13 PM



A French pharmacist with a pack of the morning after pill. Image AFP

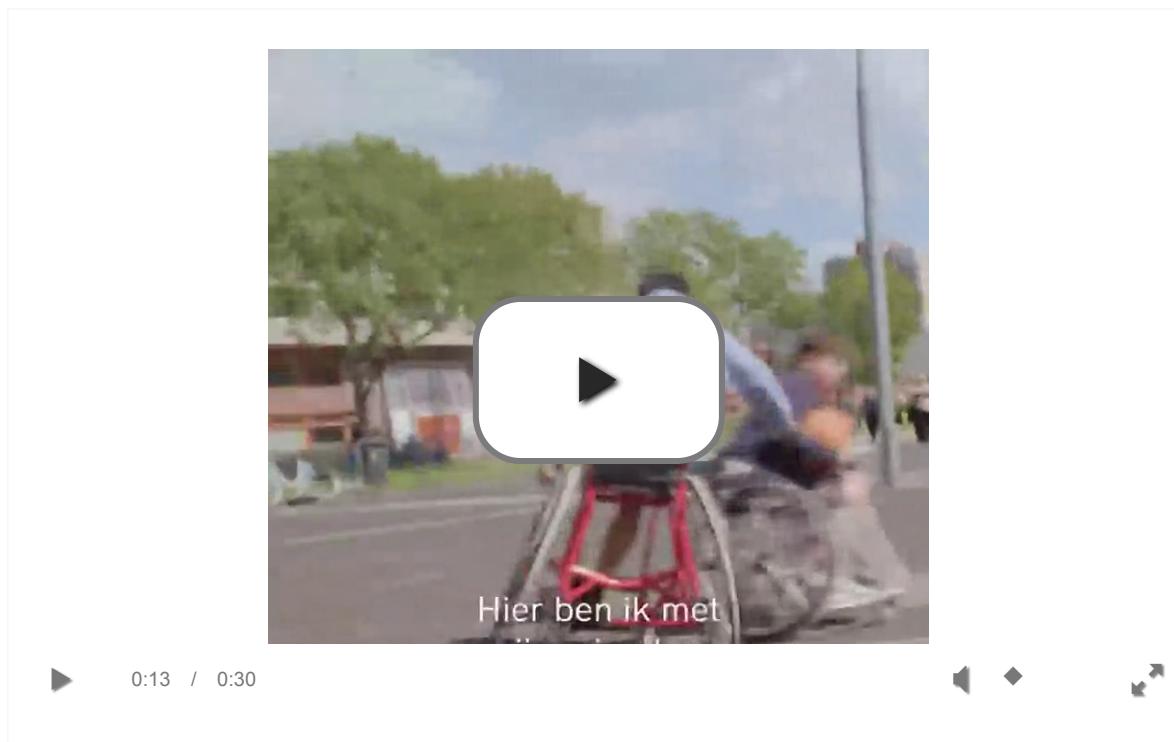
1. What is the French plan?

Every woman can, if it is up to the French Minister of Health François

pharmacy free of charge, without a prescription. Taking the morning-after pill is most effective within 24 hours of unprotected sex, so there should be as few hurdles as possible for women, Braun said in an interview [with the newspaper 20 minutes](#).

This in fact extends existing French regulations. The morning after pill is already free for minors and, with prescription, for women up to 26 – just like other contraceptives. Financial reasons should not play a role in whether or not to take the morning after pill, Minister Isabel Rome for Equality between Women and Men adds in a statement. "That's the main reason women refrain from emergency contraception, and that's why the government is taking concrete action." According to [the European Consortium for Emergency Contraception](#), a morning-after pill in France costs between 7 and 19 euros, depending on the drug.

The French cabinet is also making STI tests free for up to age 26, for both men and women. Currently, only an HIV test is free. Minister Braun sees an increase in the number of sexually transmitted diseases. He says he does not know whether this has to do with the cost of an STD test: 'Is it a lack of prevention? To information? Is there global talk of loosening the reins on this important issue?'



The French plan is fairly progressive, although there are other countries with similar policies. In 2020, Belgium decided to make a substantial allowance for all women who want to buy a morning-after pill, so that the pill is in many cases free or almost free. Spain announced earlier this year that emergency contraception will be free for all women at health centers. The morning after pill is also available for free at many locations in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, there are major differences in the rules between European countries. Some countries make the drug available to women under a certain age free of charge. With or without a prescription, as in Germany. In Finland and Portugal, for example, it is free for all women in a limited number of locations, such as family planning centers or hospitals. Other countries do not reimburse anything in most cases, not even for young women, such as Denmark and Austria.

The French intention seems to fit within a broader discussion in European countries about inequality in costs for women related to sexual health. France, for example, already made menstrual products free of charge at universities. As part of legislation on abortion and the morning after pill, Spain announced that menstrual products would be free in schools. In addition, following the example of some Asian countries, women can get leave from work if they are dealing with severe menstrual complaints. Scotland is the first country in the world to have all menstrual products **free for all women** from August .

3. Is there support in the Netherlands for making the morning after pill free of charge?

Here, women up to the age of 21 are reimbursed for contraceptives, including the morning-after pill, under the basic insurance. Between the ages of 18 and 21, this is at the expense of the deductible. If you are over 21, you can take out additional contraception insurance. There have been calls for years to get contraception back in the basic insurance. Since 2011, this has no longer been the case here, because contraception is not seen as medically necessary.

Political proposals to reimburse all contraception have so far failed.

Representatives for free contraception, with the support of the ChristenUnie, but the outgoing cabinet left a decision on this to the new cabinet.

At the initiative of GroenLinks, an amendment to the budget was submitted in October 2021 for a subsidy scheme for free contraception. That amendment was voted down. The current cabinet only wants free contraception for 'vulnerable groups'. However, that plan has yet to be worked out.

Women's rights activists are also trying to get contraception back in the basic package through the courts. Bureau Clara Wichmann and other activist groups [lost a case last year](#) advocating discrimination. In most cases, women would pay for the cost of contraception, which would endanger women's reproductive rights, Bureau Clara Wichmann believes.

Research by the Rutgers knowledge center for sexual health, for example, shows that 2 percent of women do not use contraception for cost reasons. However, the judge considered it a matter for politicians. In August, the plaintiffs [appealed](#) the ruling.

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