



ECEC
european
consortium
for emergency
contraception

Repeated use of emergency contraceptive pills

Summary of current recommendations

July 2026

2nd edition

Key messages

- Repeated use of emergency contraceptive (EC) pills is safe and effective, and women [A] should not be denied access to them.
- EC pills are always safer than pregnancy and using them is more effective than not using any contraceptive method at all.
- There are special considerations for repeated use of EC pills in the same menstrual cycle.
- After taking EC pills, condoms should be used until the next period, or sex should be avoided; but if unprotected sex happens again, another dose of EC pills can be taken.
- EC pills are less effective than using a regular contraceptive method. However, EC pills may be the only available or affordable option for some women, or the method they prefer to use.
- To support informed choice, individuals should be provided with clear and accurate information, including on relative effectiveness, and offered a range of options for protection against unplanned pregnancy.

Introduction

Emergency contraception (EC) refers to methods of contraception that can be used after unprotected sex. The most common forms are EC pills (also known as the morning after pill) containing 30 mg of ulipristal acetate (UPA) or 1,5 mg of levonorgestrel (LNG). EC pills with a low dose of mifepristone (10 to 25 mg) are also available in a few countries. EC pills with LNG are registered and/or available in an estimated 145 countries, and EC pills with UPA in an estimated 77 countries.^[1]

Sales and use of EC pills have grown in most parts of the world in the past decade.^[2] Recent research findings,^{[3],[4]} as well as population surveys^[5] and anecdotal data,^[6] suggest that EC pills are used on multiple occasions by the same individuals. This has raised concerns about the safety, efficacy and long-term effects of such repeated use of a contraceptive that was initially developed and is indicated for occasional use. More research is needed to better understand how often women in different settings use EC pills and the reasons they do so.^[7]

[A] In this document the word 'woman' (and associated pronouns she/her) is used to describe all people who can get pregnant.

This document provides a summary of what is known about repeated use of LNG and UPA EC pills. It is informed by evidence-based recommendations by the World Health Organization (WHO)^[8] and the College of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (CoSRH).^[9] It is aimed at users and the general public; advocates, pharmacists, and policymakers; as well as journalists and social media content creators, who play an increasingly critical role in informing the public. Understanding how EC pills work, including how they work when used repeatedly, is important to avoid overestimating their effectiveness^[10] and to advise women on how to best use them. This second edition reflects WHO's revised *Medical eligibility criteria for contraceptive use*.

EC pills are sold under many different brands. The European Consortium for Emergency Contraception (ECEC) recommends identifying in the EC package or patient leaflet what the active ingredient in the pill being used is (LNG or UPA), as this has implications for its repeated use.

Repeated use of emergency contraceptive pills

Currently there is no formal or standardized definition of 'repeated use' of EC pills. 'Repeated use' can refer to a person taking an EC pill:

- On two or more occasions in their lifetime
- More than once in a menstrual cycle
- Or as 'on-demand' contraception, for example at each time of having unprotected sexual intercourse

The available evidence suggests that EC pills do not become less effective when used repeatedly. Although EC pills are labelled for single use, taking them more than once does not pose any known health risks.

Regarding EC pill use more than once in a menstrual cycle, WHO has reviewed the evidence: Data is limited and of very low certainty but does not suggest safety concerns.^{[11],[12]} Therefore, there are no restrictions on the use of LNG and UPA EC pills more than once in a menstrual cycle.^[13]

Special considerations for repeated use within the same menstrual cycle

EC pills work by delaying or preventing ovulation; therefore, a woman is highly likely to ovulate a few days after taking an EC pill, and she could get pregnant if she has unprotected sex again.^[14] Using condoms or avoiding sex after EC pills is strongly recommended; but if unprotected sex happens again, the woman is at risk for pregnancy and another dose of EC pills can be taken. In this case, following these recommendations is advised:

- The active ingredients in EC pills have a half-life of approximately 24 hours, and remain active in the body during this time.^{[15], [16]} Therefore, an additional EC pill is generally not needed within 24 hours. However, this does not mean that the person remains protected against pregnancy from subsequent acts of intercourse.
- After 24 hours, and within the same cycle, she can take a repeated dose as follows:
 - If a woman has already taken a UPA EC pill, she can take another UPA EC pill.^[17]
 - If a woman has already taken an LNG EC pill, she can take another LNG-EC pill.^[18]
- In the first 5 to 7 days after taking EC pills, she should not combine types of EC pills because the LNG could interfere with the UPA's action to delay ovulation.^[19]

The effectiveness of EC pills depends on the timing of a woman's ovulation in relation to when she had unprotected sex. Depending on the time in her cycle EC pills are taken, these may postpone (delay) ovulation or may inhibit it (suspend till the next cycle). For the user, it is not possible to know if ovulation was postponed or inhibited, and therefore, using EC pills again is recommended if unprotected sex happens again within the same menstrual cycle.

Other recommendations and facts

- Using a condom or abstaining from sex until the next period is recommended after EC pill use. But if unprotected sex happens again after 24 hours, EC pills can be used again.^[20]
- Ongoing hormonal contraception can be started (or resumed) right after intake of LNG EC pills^[21], but it may not be effective right away. Individuals need to use a condom or abstain from sex for 7 days from starting (or resuming) their ongoing hormonal contraception.
- If UPA EC pills were used, it is recommended to wait 5 days before using (or resuming) an ongoing hormonal contraceptive.^[22] Individuals should be advised to use a condom or abstain from sex during this time, plus an additional 7 days once an ongoing contraception is started (or approximately for a total of 2 weeks from the time UPA was taken).
- Using EC pills does not affect a woman's long-term fertility.^[23]
- Repeated use of EC pills does not cause health risks, but it can result in menstrual irregularities.^[24]
- A double dose (3 mg) of LNG EC pills can be taken in certain instances. This is recommended if a woman is taking specific enzyme-inducing drugs^[25]. The FSRH recommends either this dose or UPA EC pills for women with higher weight (>70 kg) or body mass index (>26 kg/m²).^[26]
- Taking a double-dose of UPA-EC pills is not currently recommended.^[27]
- Repeating a dose of EC pills is recommended if vomiting occurs within 3 hours of taking LNG or UPA EC pills.^[28]
- There is currently no literature on the side effects or adverse events following long-term use of EC pills over multiple years.
- As with any contraceptive method, EC pills reduce the absolute risk of ectopic pregnancy by reducing pregnancy risk overall. Data on the increased risk of ectopic pregnancy with repeated use is limited.^[29]
- WHO and CoSRH do not provide recommendations related to the repeated use of mifepristone (10 mg – 25 mg) EC pills.
- EC pills do not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

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