

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE





Emergency Contraception Health Care Providers Quick Reference Guide



Division of Reproductive Health
Ministry of Public Health & Sanitation, Afya House
P. O. Box 30016 – 00100 Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 (0)20-2717077
Fax: +254 (0)20-2721183
Email: drh-head@africaonline.co.ke
Website: www.drh.go.ke

Introduction

According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey of 2003, close to half of births in the preceding 5 years were mistimed or unwanted. Unplanned pregnancies lead women to seek abortions or get children they cannot care for effectively. Use of emergency contraceptives (EC) is recommended for women who have had unprotected sexual intercourse and desire to prevent pregnancy. The Ministry of Health (MOH) recommends use of EC within 120 hours for women who have had unprotected sexual intercourse and desire to prevent pregnancy. Effective provision of EC is an important component of adolescent reproductive health and post-rape care programs.

“I think we have not adequately explained to the community that the morning-after pill should be used only in situations where people have accidentally had unprotected sex or in the case of sexual coercion.”

Dr. Shahnaaz Sharif – Head of Technical Services – Ministry of Public Health & Sanitation. (Remarks made at the World Contraception Day event at Kangemi, Nairobi on 26th September 2008)

“We need to educate members of the public so that they have the correct information regarding the use of the morning-after pill.”

Rosalyn Gichora – District Officer, Nairobi West District. (Remarks made at the World Contraception Day event at Kangemi, Nairobi on 26th September 2008)

Why this guide?

The Health Care Providers Quick Reference Guide has been developed as part of a larger ongoing programme on mainstreaming EC in the public and private sectors. The main objective of this guide is to give an opportunity to healthcare providers to be able to make quick reference on any key issue with regard to EC in the course of their work. It is intended to supplement the information on EC provided in the current MOH Family Planning Guidelines for Service Providers.

What is EC?

Emergency contraception refers to the use of certain contraceptive methods by women and girls to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse. These methods include specific products like Postinor 2 and Pregnon, and normal birth control pills. They should not be used as routine methods of family planning (FP).

Why is EC important?

- EC provides a second chance for preventing pregnancy after unprotected sex.
- EC can reduce unwanted pregnancy which may end up in child neglect, abandonment and unsafe abortions. Unsafe abortion is a major cause of maternal death in Kenya.
- Is an important element in adolescent reproductive health program. Young people need to have correct information on many of the risk factors that are likely to impact negatively to their lives such as HIV/AIDS including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies.
- Post-rape care, prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV and is an essential component of quality FP service provision.

When does a woman need to use EC?

EC is used after unprotected sex; including the following situations:

- When no FP method is used.
- When a method is used but it does not function properly e.g. condom breaks, IUCD slips out.
- When a woman forgets to take oral contraceptive pills for 2 or more days, or delays injectable for more than two weeks.
- When a woman is raped/coerced into unprotected sex.

Key points about EC pills

- *Safe, effective and easy to use.* EC can be safely used by adolescents.
- *Should be started as soon as possible*, but within 120 hours of unprotected sex. The second pill should be taken within 12 hours after the first or alternatively the two pills can be taken at once (as a single dose).
- Referred to as 'morning-after pill', but this reference is misleading as it implies that one has to wait for sometime before using the pill.
- *No medical exam or pregnancy tests necessary.*
- Can be used any time of the menstrual cycle.
- *Should not be used as a regular method of contraception* because EC pills are less effective and have more side effects than other family planning methods.
- EC pills *do not work once a woman is pregnant.* Therefore women/girls who are already pregnant should not take EC pills. However they will not harm a fetus that is already formed or cause a pregnancy.
- EC pills are *available in MOH facilities* and over the counter at pharmacies.

How does EC prevent pregnancy?

EC pills work in various ways depending on the time in a woman's cycle when she has sexual intercourse. *EC does not cause abortion* because it works before implantation.

EC Pills are thought to:

- Inhibit or delay ovulation.
- Inhibit/slow down transportation of egg/sperm through the fallopian tubes; hence preventing fertilization.
- Prevent implantation.

Types of hormonal EC pills

1. Dedicated EC pills: They contain the same progestin hormones as other progestin only pills, although in higher doses. They are more effective than combined oral contraceptive pills and cause fewer side effects. This regimen prevents pregnancy by about 85% if taken within 120 hours.

- There are many brands of dedicated EC pills currently available in Kenya such as Postinor 2, Pregnon, Smart Lady, ECee2, Truston2.
- Some of these brands are found in government health facilities and should be ordered in the same way as other contraceptives.

2. Combined oral contraceptive pills: also called Yuzpe method. These contain the hormones estrogen and progestin and prevent about 75% of the expected pregnancies.

3. Progestin only contraceptive pills: These can be used for EC. One needs two doses of 20 tablets.

The following are dosage guidelines for different EC pill regimens

Pill type	Common brand names	Tablets per dose	Doses	Timing of administration
Dedicated EC pills**	Postinor 2 Pregnon Smart lady Ecee2	1 1 1	2 2 2	<i>For all types:</i> First dose within 120 hours after unprotected sex. 2 nd dose 12 hours later.
Combined pills	Microgynon Chaguo langu	4	2	
Progestin only pills	Microlut	20	2	

** Alternatively, clients can be given 1.5 mg of levonorgestrel in a single dose (i.e. both pills at once). One dose is easier for the client to take and works just as well a 2 doses, according to current WHO guidelines.

Side effects and management

- *Nausea and vomiting are the most common side effects.*
- Other possible effects include headaches, dizziness, fatigue, breast tenderness due to the high hormone doses in emergency contraception pills.
- Most side effects *generally disappear in 24 hours* of taking the pills.
- To reduce the effects of nausea, EC pills can be taken with food or a medical provider can offer anti-nausea drugs before taking EC.
- If a woman vomits <2 hours after taking a dose of EC the dose should be repeated.
- If vomiting occurs more than 2 hours after taking ECPs, she does not need to take any extra pills.

Counseling clients

Women needing EC may be in crisis and fear unplanned pregnancy. As much as possible it is important for a provider to counsel a client on EC. *Unless in the case of rape, it is an opportunity to discuss use of regular FP method.*

- Recommend that client uses a method of FP for the rest of the cycle after taking EC pills.
- Many women who need EC also need protection from STIs/HIV. Counseling on EC is an opportunity to discuss the risks of STIs and prevention options.
- When you explain mode of action to clients, reassure them that EC pills do not cause abortion.
- Discuss the possibility that EC may fail.
- Refer for FP and other reproductive health services. Women who have been raped or traumatized need to be referred for more comprehensive medical and psychosocial care.

Starting family planning methods after EC

Method	When to start
Condom	Immediately after EC Use also for dual protection
Oral contraceptive pills	Next day after 2nd dose of EC or 1-7 days after menses
Injection IUD Norplant	1-7 days after next period

EC pills and HIV/AIDS/STIs

EC pills do not protect against STIs including HIV.

- All EC users should also be referred for voluntary counseling and testing.
- In case of rape, providers can give post-exposure prophylaxis for STIs/HIV.

Common questions

- **What are the effects of EC on periods?**
EC pills do not cause periods to start immediately. Periods will come at the normal time but may delay or come early by 2-3 days.
- **Can EC pills protect one for the rest of the cycle?**
It will not, and any further unprotected acts put one at risk. Women should use a regular method of FP or condoms for further protection.
- **Can EC pills harm an already formed baby?**
No. It has been determined that EC pills do not have any serious effects to harm a formed baby.

- **When can one resume/start a regular FP method after taking EC?**
One can start by using condoms and pills. One has to wait until next period to begin using injections, IUDs and implants.
- **Can I use EC pills every time I have sex?**
Women/girls should not use EC pills as a regular method. They should only be used in emergency situations. EC pills are less effective than many regular FP methods.
- **What if I have unprotected sex again after taking EC?**
If one has unprotected sex after using EC, they will not offer protection from pregnancy. One will need to repeat the treatment, unless they already started a regular FP method.
- **What if I had sex multiple times before taking EC pills?**
You can still use EC pills if the last time you had sex was within 5 days. If one is already pregnant from an earlier act of unprotected sex, the EC pills will not have any effect.

This booklet has been adapted from the National FP Guidelines (Kenya MOH, 2005), with additional information drawn from Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers (WHO: Geneva, 2008). The adaptation was conducted by the staff of the Division of Reproductive Health, Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation and ECAfrique staff of the Population Council. Publication date 2008.



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