New Recommendations for Emergency Contraception in the COVID-19 Era

American Society for Emergency Contraception recommends keeping an advance supply of EC at home

Princeton, NJ (May 19, 2020) – The American Society for Emergency Contraception (ASEC) released a report with new recommendations for accessing emergency contraception (EC) during the COVID-19 pandemic. EC is contraception that can prevent pregnancy after sex.

There are two pill formulations of EC available in the United States. Progestin-only EC (such as Plan B One-Step, AfterPill and Take Action) is available over the counter, and Ulipristal acetate EC (sold as ella) is available with prescription only. Progestin-only EC is generally easier to get, but ella is more effective, particularly for those who weigh more than 165 pounds.

From the report: “The rapid spread of COVID-19 has highlighted fundamental gaps in the American healthcare system, weaknesses in our social fabric, and striking racial and economic disparities. Access to reproductive healthcare is as essential as ever, yet the pandemic layers new barriers upon existing challenges. Now more than ever, emergency contraception (EC) is an important option for individuals who want to prevent pregnancy on their own terms. Having EC on hand before it is needed can make that a possibility any time, but particularly during this crisis.”

ASEC Executive Director Kelly Cleland stated, “Those who need reproductive healthcare face barriers upon barriers during the COVID-19 crisis; one way that people can protect themselves without needing an in-person visit to a clinic or doctor’s office is getting a supply of emergency contraception to have on hand before it’s needed.”

Stay-at-home orders and social distancing may increase consensual sex between partners who live together; at the same time, there has been a notable rise in reports of intimate partner violence, which can lead to a rise in sexual assault, coerced sex, and contraceptive sabotage. EC is a critically important strategy for preventing pregnancy in all of these situations.

Cleland added: “EC is more likely to be effective at preventing pregnancy the sooner it is taken, so delays in getting and using EC can mean the difference between preventing pregnancy and becoming pregnant. During the COVID-19 crisis, economic uncertainty and health concerns may make preventing pregnancy an especially high priority.”

The ASEC report details several different ways that individuals at risk of pregnancy can get EC in advance of need. These include asking a healthcare provider to call a prescription in to a local pharmacy and picking up a dose of progestin-only EC from OTC shelves at a regular visit to a store that has a pharmacy
section. For those who are avoiding trips to physical stores as much as possible, there are several online pharmacies that will dispense prescription-only EC ( ella) after a consultation with a healthcare provider. Many online sources sell non-prescription EC (progestin-only); while many are reputable ASEC cautions that when purchasing from sites such as Amazon, it’s important to take a closer look at the seller to ensure that it is a legitimate company.

“For years, reproductive health experts have recommended that people keep EC on hand just in case they need it,” said Cleland. “This recommendation is more relevant than ever, during the public health crisis presented by COVID-19.”

###

The American Society for Emergency Contraception works to promote information about and access to emergency contraception in the United States. For more information, visit www.americansocietyforec.org.