

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

Healthy couples are needed to help study Human Papillomavirus (HPV) in men and women. You may have it and not know it. Call (520) 514-6015. Compensation provided.

Q. How do emergency contraception pills like Plan B work?

A. Plan B is the FDA-approved brand of emergency contraception pills (ECPs) that contain the hormone Levonorgestrel (a component of many birth control pills). When taken within 3-5 days of unprotected intercourse, Plan B reduces the risk of pregnancy by 75-89%. The sooner Plan B is taken, the higher the odds are that it will prevent pregnancy.

Plan B works primarily by preventing ovulation and is most effective when used prior to ovulation during a woman's monthly cycle. Emergency contraception will not disrupt an implanted pregnancy. Plan B is not the "abortion pill" and will not harm nor terminate a pregnancy that is developing in the uterine wall. Emergency contraceptive pills may also work to alter the mucus in a woman's cervix (making it difficult for sperm to move up into the uterus) and change the transportation mechanism of the sperm and eggs in the fallopian tube. In some cases, ECPs may prevent a fertilized egg from implanting in the uterine wall.

A recent government ruling approved the sale of Plan B for distribution in pharmacies. This makes ECPs more accessible since a woman no longer needs to have a medical visit and a prescription to get ECPs. To obtain Plan B, a woman does need to show a government-issued form of identification to prove that she is 18 years of age or older.

The UA Campus Health Service has prescribed and dispensed ECPs for many years. In early December 2006, Campus Health will begin offering Plan B without a prescription. The cost will be approximately \$30. Plan B is available at Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona for \$30 and at Walgreen's for over \$40. To find out more about Plan B, visit the web at www.go2planb.com.

While not as effective as routine use of regular contraceptive pills (98-99.7%), the use of ECPs could prevent as many as 1.5 million unintended pregnancies in the United States alone – almost one half of the 3 million unplanned pregnancies that occur every year in our country.

Resource: Contraceptive Technology, 2004.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu



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