

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

On March 23, 2009, a Federal Judge ordered the Food and Drug Administration to lower the age restriction and make the Plan B emergency contraceptive available to 17 year olds within 30 days. (Reuters)

Q. Is the Morning After Pill the same thing as the Abortion Pill? What do each of them do?

A. The morning after pill, also called Emergency Contraception (EC) is *very* different from the abortion pill.

Emergency Contraception, approved by the FDA and marketed as Plan B, is a combination of two different hormones that works by preventing implantation of a fertilized egg (the medical definition of pregnancy). When taken within 120 hours (5 days) or less of a single act of unprotected intercourse, EC can reduce pregnancy risk by 75-89%. The sooner EC is taken (it works best in the first 24 hours), the higher the effectiveness. It will not end a pregnancy once a fertilized egg has implanted into the wall of the uterus (womb). If a pregnant woman uses EC, the growing embryo will continue developing, unaffected by the low dose of hormones in the medication. Plan B does not require a prescription and can be obtained at pharmacies by males or females, 18 or older. The cost for EC at the UA Campus Health Service and Planned Parenthood is \$35.

While EC is important to know about, especially in cases of sexual assault, unplanned or unprotected sex, it is not nearly as effective as other hormonal methods. Oral contraceptives, the Nuva-Ring, Implanon, and Depo-Provera are 98-99.7% effective in preventing pregnancy. EC is intended for emergencies only and should not be relied on as a regular method of birth control. Side effects include nausea, abdominal pain, and menstrual changes.

The Abortion Pill is a combination of two drugs: Mifeprex (the drug called RU-486 in Europe) and Misoprostol. The two medications, taken a day apart, are approximately 95% effective in causing abortion in early pregnancy. This method (medication abortion) is an option when administered within 9 weeks after the start of the last menstrual period. The drugs cause the contents of the uterus (embryo, placenta, etc.) to be expelled. The cost for a medication abortion is around \$450 and requires at least one follow-up medical visit with sonogram (2 weeks after taking the pills) to confirm that the pregnancy has been terminated. Side effects include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, headache, and cramping. Planned Parenthood and the Tucson Women's Center offer abortion services in addition to many other women's health services.



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

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