

Drugstore Dilemma: What to do if Your Pharmacy Won't Give You Birth Control Pills or Emergency Contraception (the "Morning-After Pill")

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There have been increasing reports of pharmacists and pharmacies refusing to fill women's prescriptions for birth control, including emergency contraception (the "morning-after pill" or EC). These refusals to dispense prescription contraceptives are based on personal beliefs, not on legitimate medical or professional concerns. The same pharmacists who refuse to dispense contraceptives because of their personal beliefs often refuse to transfer a woman's prescription to another pharmacist or to refer her to another pharmacy. These refusals can have devastating consequences for women's health.

Refusals to provide EC are especially problematic, since EC is an extremely time-sensitive drug that is most effective if used within the first 12 to 24 hours following birth control failure, unprotected sex, or sexual assault. Despite the FDA's decision to approve EC for over-the-counter use by individuals 18 and older, refusals continue to occur. Under the FDA's conditions of approval, EC must remain *behind the counter*, so even women who do not need a prescription must interact with pharmacists or other pharmacy staff who may have strong personal beliefs against providing the drug.

If you tried to fill a prescription for EC or regular contraception, or tried to buy non-prescription EC, and your pharmacist refused, contact the National Women's Law Center at 1-866-PILL-4-US or info@nwlc.org.

We may be able to help you:

- File a complaint against the pharmacist or pharmacy with your state pharmacy board.
- Encourage the pharmacy to correct the problem.
- Get media to publicize the refusal and educate the public about the issue.
- Secure policies in your state to make sure women get the care they need.

If you were refused EC, and *less than 120 hours* have passed since you had unprotected sex:

- If you are under 18 and need a prescription for EC, visit www.not-2-late.com for providers that will write you a prescription for EC. If you are under 18 and live in AK, CA, HI, MA, ME, NH, NM, VT or WA, you can get EC directly from any pharmacist that participates in your state's pharmacy access program. Visit <http://www.EC-Help.org> for more information.
- If you already have a prescription, or if you are 18 or older and are having problems accessing non-prescription EC, visit www.not-2-late.com to find other locations where EC is available in your area.
- Many Planned Parenthood clinics also have phone or e-mail services. Call 1-800-230-PLAN for one near you.
- Please note that you may have to pay for some of these services.

How to avoid facing a refusal in the pharmacy at a critical moment:

- Use the resources listed above **right now** so that you have EC in your medicine cabinet in case you need it. Ask your doctor about EC during a routine appointment, purchase EC at a pharmacy now, or get an advance prescription and *then* purchase EC! See <http://ec.princeton.edu/questions/ecbefore.html> for more information.
- If your insurance plan has a prescription mail service, use it to fill your prescriptions for birth control and EC.
- Ask in advance if your local drug store allows pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions for any reason so you know where to go **before** an emergency happens.
- Also, talk to your other health care providers in advance about whether they will provide you with the information and services you need. See www.nwlc.org/pdf/ASKBrochureAugust2004.pdf to find out what questions to ask.