

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

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 are based on personal beliefs, not on legitimate medical or professional concerns. The same pharmacists who refuse to dispense contraceptives 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. Three brands of EC are available without a prescription for individuals 17 and older and are most effective if used within the first 12 to 24 hours following birth control failure, unprotected sex, or sexual assault. A prescription-only product – ella® – is effective up to 120 hours. Even though individuals 17 and older no longer need a prescription for certain EC products, refusals continue to occur. The FDA requires that EC be kept *behind the counter*, so even individuals who do not need a prescription must interact with pharmacy staff who may have strong personal beliefs against providing the drug.

If your pharmacist refused to give you EC or fill a prescription for regular contraception, 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 need a prescription for ella®, or if you are under 17 and need a prescription for EC, you have several options. You can visit www.not-2-late.com for providers who will write you a prescription for EC. You can also order ella® through <http://www.ella-kwikmed.com/>, an online prescription service. If you live in AK, CA, HI, MA, ME, NH, NM, VT or WA, you can get EC directly from any pharmacist who 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 17 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 you have EC in case you need it. Ask your doctor about EC during a routine appointment, purchase EC at a pharmacy now, or if you are under 17 or want to purchase ella®, 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.
- 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 <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/ask-will-moral-or-religious-beliefs-your-health-care-providers-limit-your-access-health-car> to find out what questions to ask.