

Accessing Non-Prescription Emergency Contraception: The Basics

What is emergency contraception (EC)?

EC is an FDA-approved form of contraception that prevents pregnancy after sex. It is also known as the “morning-after pill.” There are four EC products on the market: Next Choice[®], Plan B One-Step[®], and Levonorgestrel Tablets contain the same ingredient found in many birth control pills. They are effective at preventing pregnancy up to 3 days (72 hours) after unprotected sex or contraceptive failure, but are more effective the sooner they are taken. ella[®] is a different EC product that is effective up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex or contraceptive failure and does not lose its effectiveness.

Do I need a prescription?

Next Choice, Plan B One-Step, and Levonorgestrel Tablets are available without a prescription for consumers – male or female – who are 17 and older. If you are younger than 17 you will need a prescription for these products. ella is only available by prescription.

Where is non-prescription EC sold?

Non-prescription EC is available at pharmacies and health care clinics. Even though Next Choice, Plan B One Step, and Levonorgestrel Tablets are available without a prescription, the FDA requires that a health professional, such as a pharmacist or a physician, be available to answer questions if needed. As a result, non-prescription EC is not available in places like gas stations or convenience stores.

How do I get non-prescription EC at a pharmacy?

Individuals seeking non-prescription EC – *regardless of their age* – need to ask for it at the pharmacy counter. If you are 17 or older, you only need to show identification to prove your age. Anyone behind the pharmacy counter, including pharmacy technicians, can sell non-prescription EC. If you are under 17 or if you would like to use ella, you need to present a prescription to the pharmacist.

But I thought that EC is “over-the-counter” for individuals 17 and older?

Because of restrictions the FDA placed on non-prescription EC sales, pharmacies can't stock non-prescription EC next to other over-the-counter products like aspirin. “Over-the-counter” in this case means that those 17 and older may purchase those products without first getting a prescription.

Who can buy non-prescription EC?

The EC products that are available without a prescription are approved for all *consumers* age 17 and older. Thus, both women and men who are 17 or older can request the non-prescription EC at a pharmacy or health clinic, contingent upon showing an appropriate ID.

What forms of ID do individuals age 17 and older need to buy non-prescription EC?

The FDA did not list specific forms of ID that must be presented to verify a consumer's age, and that decision is left to individual pharmacies. A driver's license or passport is certainly sufficient, and other forms of ID, including ID issued by foreign governments, should be accepted as well.

I'm under 17 years old or would like to use ella[®]. How do I get a prescription?

If you need help getting a prescription, go to <http://www.not-2-late.com>. If you live in AK, CA, HI, ME, MA, NH, NM, VT, or WA you may be able to get EC directly from a pharmacist without first obtaining a prescription. See <http://www.EC-Help.org>.

How much does EC cost?

Prices for EC vary, but may run as high as \$70. The generics Next Choice and Levonorgestrel Tablets costs 10-20% less than Plan B One Step. Right now, non-prescription EC might not be covered by your insurance, because insurance generally does not cover non-prescription products. Since ella[®] is a prescription-only product, it should be covered by some private and public health insurance plans. However, thanks to the new health care law, all new insurance plans will soon be required to provide insurance coverage of all FDA-approved contraceptive methods, including EC, without cost-sharing.

**It is important to take action as soon as possible after unprotected sex.
Understand your options and take the method that is best for you.**

We want to know about your EC experience! Call 1-866-Pill4Us or email info@nwlc.org and tell us about your success – or if you run into any problems – obtaining EC.