



Emergency Contraception: An Important Component of Women's Rights

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION ADVANCES WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Emergency Contraception is valuable because it:

- prevents unwanted pregnancies
- serves women's health needs
- advances reproductive self-determination

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION PREVENTS PREGNANCY

Emergency Contraception — or EC — is a method of preventing pregnancy within a few hours or a few days after unprotected sexual intercourse, according to the definition of the World Health Organization.

Pregnancy begins when the fertilized egg is implanted in the woman's uterine wall. This occurs at the end of the first week after conception. Emergency Contraception acts prior to implantation (or the onset of pregnancy).

THREE METHODS OF EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION ARE COMMON

The three most common methods of emergency contraception are:

- *Emergency Contraception pills* (ECPs) are ordinary oral contraceptive pills containing estrogen and progestin hormones; the first dose is taken within 72 hours of intercourse, followed by a second dose 12 hours later.

- *Minipills* are oral contraceptive pills containing progestin only, taken within 72 hours after sexual intercourse, followed by a second dose 12 hours later.

Examples of Situations When Women Consider Emergency Contraception

- **She has a sexual encounter and uses contraception, but the condom breaks or the contraception fails**
- **She is raped in her home, on the street, or in an armed conflict**
- **She does not want a pregnancy**
- **She faces health risks as a result of pregnancy**
- **She is being held in a refugee camp and cannot adequately plan for her future**

- The *copper-T IUD* (intrauterine device) is inserted up to five days after unprotected intercourse.

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION WORKS AFTER UNPROTECTED SEX

Because emergency contraception is used at all stages of a woman's men-

strual cycle, its mode of action varies. After intercourse, Emergency Contraception may prevent pregnancy by delaying or inhibiting ovulation, inhibiting fertilization, or inhibiting implantation of the fertilized egg.

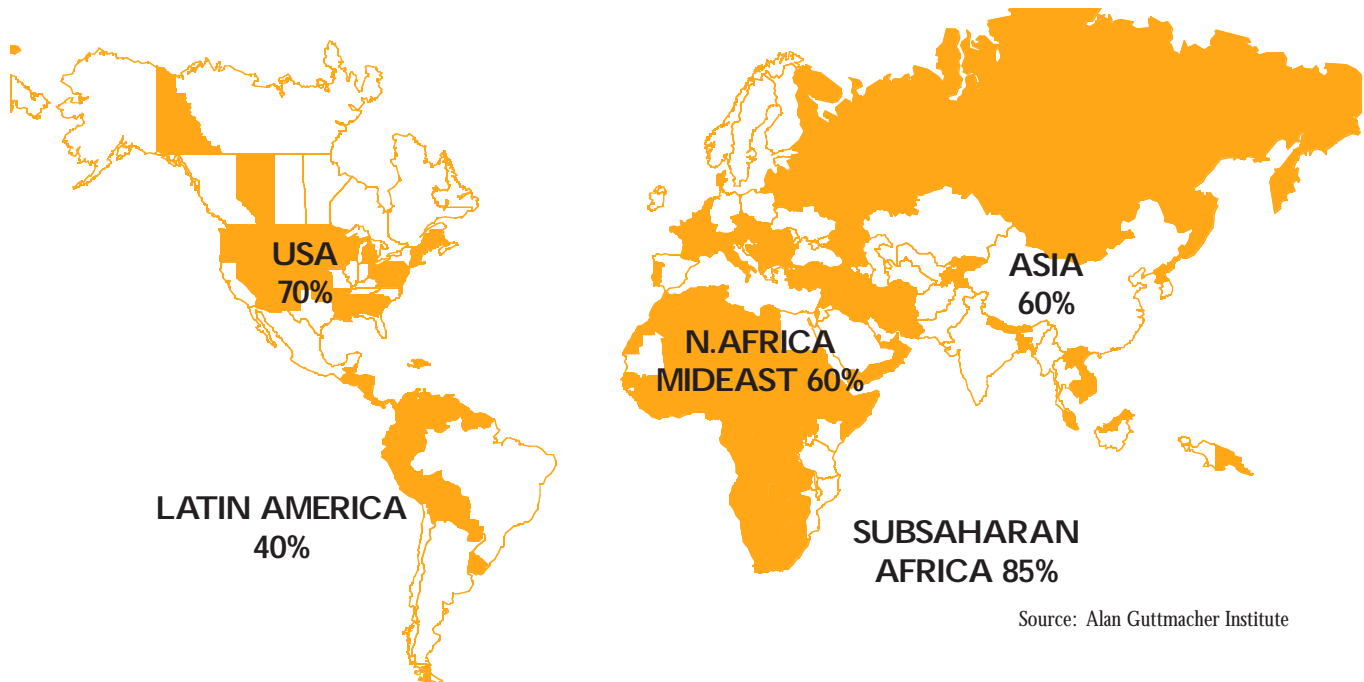
EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION CANNOT BE EQUATED WITH ABORTION

Some extremist groups oppose Emergency Contraception by equating Emergency Contraception with abortion, which they also oppose. These groups are out-of-step with the mainstream medical community and their views find no support in the laws and policies of countries around the world. Abortion is a means of terminating a pregnancy, which begins after implantation of the fertilized egg in the uterine wall. Emergency Contraception acts to prevent implantation and pregnancy. The attacks against Emergency Contraception are unwarranted and must be seen as part of an attempt to ban all family planning.

LAWS AROUND THE WORLD ARE CLEAR THAT ABORTION IS DIFFERENT FROM EC

Laws around the world make it clear that Emergency Contraception cannot be equated with abortion. Emergency Contraception acts before implantation and, accordingly, is unlike abortion. The laws of a majority of the world's

Percentage of Sexually-Active Women in Their Reproductive Years with Inadequate Contraception



- 210 million women worldwide are estimated to become pregnant each year, but 80 million of those pregnancies are unplanned

- Unintended pregnancies result in 20 million abortions annually worldwide

- Pregnancy-related causes kill 585,000 women annually

nations consider abortion a procedure that takes place — at the earliest — after implantation of the fertilized egg. In many nations, abortion laws refer to procedures that occur much later: after an embryo is formed (2 to 7 or 8 weeks after fertilization); after a fetus is formed (7 to 8 weeks after fertilization); at an advanced stage of pregnancy when a woman is “with child.”

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION IS SUPPORTED BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

It is also supported in the following countries, among others:

Bulgaria • Columbia • Czech Republic
Ecuador • Finland • Germany
Hungary • Jamaica • Kenya • Malaysia
Netherlands • New Zealand • Pakistan
Peru • Russia • Singapore • Slovakia
Sweden • Switzerland • Thailand
United Kingdom • United States
Uruguay • Vietnam

WOMEN WORLDWIDE ARE ENTITLED TO ACCESS TO EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

Emergency Contraception should be available and accessible to women around the world. It is a part of women’s reproductive health rights. Reproductive rights are human rights.

Selected Sources:

Anika Rahman, et.al., *A Global Review of Laws on Induced Abortion, 1985-1997*, 24 *INTERNATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING PERSPECTIVES* 56 (1998)

James Trussell et.al., *Emergency Contraception: A Cost-Effective Approach to Preventing Unintended Pregnancy*, 1 *WOMEN’S HEALTH IN PRIMARY CARE* 55 (1988)

Williams Obstetrics (19th Ed. 1993)

World Health Organization, *Emergency Contraception, A Guide for Service Delivery* (1998)

For more information, contact us for a copy of our Briefing Paper entitled *Emergency Contraception: Contraception, Not Abortion - An Analysis of Laws and Policies Around the World*

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