

# Emergency contraceptive is a safe, effective method

■ The University Health Center is working to dispel myths about this form of birth control

By Adam Jude  
Oregon Daily Emerald

While there are numerous methods of birth control, medical authorities at the University are now supporting a preventative pill that can be taken after sexual intercourse. Emergency contraception is an effective form of birth control if used within 72 hours of unprotected sex, said Dr. Gerald Fleischli, director of the University Health Center.

Although it has been available for decades, the use of emergency contraception — which gained the approval of the Food and Drug Administration in 1997 — is just beginning to rise.

"If people only knew about (emergency contraception)... then it could cut down on so many unintended pregnancies," said Colleen Jones, head of the University's women's health clinic.

Medical experts estimate that the prescribed contraception could prevent 1.7 million unintended pregnancies and 800,000 abortions each year, according to Planned Parenthood reports.

Emergency contraception is often misrepresented and referred to as the "morning-after pill," Jones said. In truth, the pill can be orally taken up to 72 hours after sex but

is more effective if initiated within the first 12 to 24 hours.

"People don't understand what it is," said Diane Duke, associate executive director of Eugene's Planned Parenthood. "They think it's the RU 486 abortion pill, which it's not."

The RU 486 pill is used primarily in Europe as a method of early medical abortion. Emergency contraception, on the other hand, prevents a pregnancy from beginning if used within the proper time frame.

"Thinking about contraception before you need it is always best," Duke said. "But contraceptive methods aren't always 100 percent, and (the emergency pill) works as a great back-up."

If a woman has sex when she is ovulating, the chances of becoming pregnant are 15 percent to 30 percent, Jones said. With emergency contraception, the chance of pregnancy is reduced to about 2 percent.

"(Emergency contraception) is very safe and very effective," Jones said.

Jones added that even if the 72-hour time frame has passed, emergency contraception may still be used to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. She encourages students to see her or another physician immediately after unprotected sex or if other forms of contraception fail.

"We're here to help. We're not here to judge people," Jones said. "Our job is to help students make the best of their college careers and that means not getting pregnant."

The Health Center, which has

## Emergency contraception

Could prevent an estimated 1.7 million unintended pregnancies and 800,000 abortions annually;  
Can be taken orally up to 72 hours after sex;

Is available at the University Health Center and Eugene Planned Parenthood.

SOURCE: Planned Parenthood

office hours on the weekend, sells the emergency pill for \$8. At Planned Parenthood, most students will be able to get the contraception for free, Duke said.

"It's not a preferred method of contraception," Fleischli said. "But it's better than nothing."

The original form of the emergency pill contained strong doses of estrogen, a hormone found in birth control pills. Nausea was a common side effect in more than 50 percent of those treated with the estrogen pill; vomiting was also prominent in about 22 percent.

Most pharmacies now issue improved pills that reduced the amount of side effects. The new method, Plan B, utilizes the hormone progesterin, which is also found in birth control pills.

Those who would like more information should contact the emergency contraception hotline at 1-888-NOT-2-LATE. Planned Parenthood also provides services at 1-800-230-PLAN.

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