

KNOWING YOUR OPTIONS:

Before and
after using emergency
contraception

INFORMING
CHOICES NI
Formerly FPA NI



Emergency Contraception

You can use emergency contraception to prevent becoming pregnant if you have had sex without using contraception, or you think your contraception may have failed – for example a condom split or you forgot to take your oral contraceptive pill. There are different types of emergency contraception available:

- the emergency intrauterine device (IUD), sometimes called ‘the coil’;
- the emergency contraceptive pill with the active ingredient ulipristal acetate, e.g., ellaOne;
- the emergency contraceptive pill with the hormone levonorgestrel, e.g., Levonelle.

An emergency IUD involves a small plastic and copper device that’s fitted in your womb up to five days after unprotected sex, or up to five days after the earliest time you could have ovulated. This is the most effective form of emergency contraception and can be accessed at some GP practices or by contacting a sexual and reproductive health clinic within your Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. If you are attending for a IUD you may also be asked to take an oral method.

If you chose to take the emergency contraceptive pill, ellaOne is more effective at preventing pregnancy than Levonelle. However, there may be times when Levonelle is more suitable to take. ellaOne can be taken within five days of unprotected sex whereas Levonelle should be taken within three days. **The sooner you take the medication, the more effective it will be.** The emergency contraceptive pill is available either on prescription or from a sexual and reproductive health clinic or community pharmacy.

Can it fail?

Some people become pregnant even though they took an emergency contraceptive pill correctly. If you vomit within three hours of taking the emergency contraceptive pill speak with a GP, pharmacist or a healthcare professional working within a sexual and reproductive health clinic as you will need to take another dose. Alternatively, you could have an emergency IUD fitted.

Ongoing contraceptive choices

If you use the IUD as emergency contraception, it can be left in and used as your ongoing contraceptive. If you take the emergency contraceptive pill, or you don’t wish to

continue using the emergency IUD as your form of contraception, you may wish to consider other methods.

Oral contraceptive pills can now be posted to you, or collected at your nearest sexual and reproductive health clinic depending on the HSC Trust area you live in. This will follow a medical consultation conducted over the telephone.

Progesterone-only oral contraceptive pills are now also available to buy without prescription in the UK after a consultation with a pharmacist. Alternatively, you may wish to obtain a supply on prescription by contacting your GP.

Long-acting reversible contraception (LARC)

LARC is contraception that doesn't depend on you remembering to take or use it to be effective. An IUD is a LARC method, as is an intrauterine system (IUS) (another type of coil), the contraceptive implant and the contraceptive injection. These forms of contraception are available at some GP practices or local sexual and reproductive health clinics. Clinics operate on an appointment only basis. To self-refer please see details and operating times below. Waiting lists for LARC can vary. This will be discussed with you during your consultation.

Central booking numbers for ongoing contraception

Belfast Trust

028 9504 5500

Monday to Thursday 9am to 11.30am and 1.30pm to 3.30pm

Friday 9am to 11.30am

Northern Trust

028 2826 6163

Monday to Friday 9am to 1.30pm

South Eastern Trust

028 9041 3796

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm

Southern Trust

028 3756 2200

Email: contraception@southerntrust.hscni.net

Monday and Wednesday 9.30am to 12.30pm

Friday 9.30am to 12pm

Western Trust

028 7132 1758

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Common Youth offers free confidential sexual health advice and contraception services to young women who are 19 and under and to young men who are 24 and under. Their clinics are located in Belfast and Coleraine. For more information, email

hello@commonyouth.com or call **028 9032 8866**.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Having sex without using a condom can put you at greater risk of contracting an STI. STIs are passed to another person through unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex, by genital contact and through the sharing of sex toys. You don't need to have multiple sexual partners to contract an STI.

Testing for STIs

The length of time it takes from contracting an STI to it showing up on a test varies depending on the type of infection. This is often referred to as the 'window period'. The window period for chlamydia and gonorrhoea is two weeks. This means a test taken less than two weeks after unprotected sex might not pick up these infections. So, you should wait two weeks after unprotected sex before testing. For a blood test, the window period is longer, seven weeks after potential exposure for HIV, and 12 weeks for syphilis, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. However, Hepatitis C can sometimes take up to six months to show in a test.

If you are worried that you may have contracted an STI but don't have any symptoms you can order a free home test kit at www.sh24.org.uk. If you have symptoms, e.g., pain during sex, irregular bleeding, pain when passing urine or unusual discharge, you should

arrange an appointment in a genito-urinary medicine (GUM) service using the clinic details below. Until you've had a check-up you should not have sex, including oral sex, without using a condom. Sexual health screening is available across Northern Ireland. You can attend a clinic in a different HSC Trust to the one you live in. By doing so you may be able to get an earlier appointment.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, contact a GUM service or your nearest Emergency Department within 72 hours of exposure to seek advice as you may be eligible for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). PEP is medication that can help prevent the development of HIV.

Central booking numbers for advice and treatments for STIs

Belfast Trust

028 9615 2111

Monday to Friday 8.15am to 10.15am

Northern Trust

028 7034 6028

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

South Eastern Trust

028 4483 8133

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

Southern Trust

028 3756 2080

Monday and Wednesday 9.00am to 4.00pm

Tuesday and Friday 9.00am to 12pm

Western Trust

028 7161 1269

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Common Youth also run an STI service for young people under 25 in their clinics in Belfast and Coleraine. For more information, email hello@commonyouth.com or call **028 9032 8866**.

Abortion care

Having sex without using contraception can put you at risk of pregnancy. On 22 October 2019 abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland. Following the change in the law early medical abortion (EMA) services (up to 9 weeks and 6 days of pregnancy dated from the first day of your last period) were established. EMA services are available in the Belfast, Northern, South Eastern and Southern HSC Trusts.

Accessing the service involves a telephone consultation with a healthcare professional who will ask some questions about the pregnancy and arrange for you to attend the clinic.

You can self-refer into a local EMA service by calling the British Pregnancy Advisory Service on **03457 30 40 30** or request a consultation at www.bpas.org/request-a-consultation/.

EMA services are not currently available within the Western HSC Trust. If you live in this area and wish further information on the options available to you, please visit www.informingchoicesni.org/central-access-point.

Funded travel and treatment in England

If the gestation of your pregnancy is beyond 10 weeks, or you cannot be treated locally, abortion services can still be accessed in England. The UK Government will cover the cost of abortion care for women from Northern Ireland who are treated in England. As part of your treatment, the following expenses will be met:

- travel arrangements;
- overnight accommodation;
- transportation (e.g., taxi).

A central booking system is provided by MSI Reproductive Choices. You can access this service by calling **0333 234 2184**.

Pregnancy counselling support

Sometimes when faced with an unplanned or crisis pregnancy it is difficult to discuss it with family and friends. This can leave you feeling vulnerable and isolated at a time when you need support. Informing Choices NI (ICNI) provides non-directive pregnancy choices counselling to all age groups. This means the counsellor has no opinion about what is best for you and is there to provide a confidential and non-judgmental place for you to explore feelings around your pregnancy, and the options that are open to you i.e., continuing with the pregnancy, abortion and adoption.

Counselling offers a safe place to talk about anything that may be confusing, painful or uncomfortable. It's often a relief to talk openly to someone you don't know about the issues you face and can also be an opportunity to help you prepare what you may want to discuss with family or friends.

Making an appointment

Counselling can be a one-off appointment or regular sessions to discuss the range of issues you have in more detail. The service is currently provided via the telephone and you can self-refer into this service by calling **028 9031 6100**. ICNI also offer post pregnancy counselling. This support is provided free of charge.



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