

What happens when women have emergency contraception (EC) to keep at home?

F. Lakha

Family planning and well woman services, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Introduction: A pilot study (Glasier et al 1998) demonstrated that women given a supply of EC to keep at home did not mis-use EC. A larger study has been ongoing in Edinburgh since September 1999 in which advanced administration of EC has been available through general practice and family planning clinics to women aged 16-29.. **Aims:** To determine the patterns of use of EC by family planning clinic attenders given a supply of EC to keep at home.

Methods: A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 300 women who had previously received 5 packets of EC to keep at home (total sample = 3500). **Results:** Mean age was 24.5 years. A total of 45.5% had completed higher education. At least 65% had had supplies at home for 6 months or more prior to completing the questionnaire 39.7% of women had used one packet of their supply, only 6% three or more, none had become pregnant. 57% used it within 12 hours of intercourse and 80% within 24 hours. 7.7% had an opportunity to use EC but did not, (the commonest reason being fear of nausea/vomiting).

10 women had an unplanned pregnancy since receiving supplies - none had used EC on that occasion. 4 failed to recognise a condom failure, 2 were away from home at the time of intercourse, 1 was concerned; about nausea and vomiting, 2 had no supplies left at home and I declined to answer the question. All 10 of these women had used at least 1 of their home supplies (effectively) previously. 5% of women had had unprotected sexual intercourse knowing that they had the back up of EC at home.

Conclusions: Most women given a supply of EC have not used more than one course. Even when women do have EC supplies at home some fail to use them. Having supplies at home facilitates early use and therefore has probably prevented unplanned pregnancy.