

Non-prescription emergency contraception

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Levonorgestrel can be used in emergency contraception (EC) at a dose of 0.75 mg taken twice at 12 hours' interval. This progestin has no contra-indication, and its efficacy is greatest if taken very soon after unprotected intercourse (95% success rate if taken within 24 hours). Taking into account these facts; in 1999 the French government approved the sale of levonorgestrel-only emergency contraception (Norlevo) on a non-prescription basis in pharmacies. What has taken place in the 30 months since this decision? The product is widely used: more than 1 000 000 units have been sold, and current sales continue at a rate of 60 000 units per month. Post-marketing surveillance has not detected any unexpected side effects. EC users are young (95% under 25 years of age), they tend to buy EC without a prescription (67% of sales), and they do not use EC as a regular contraceptive method. Sales of birth control pills continue to increase. Even so, many women who have unprotected intercourse do not use EC because they do not think they are at risk of pregnancy. Pharmacists, initially hesitant with regards to EC delivery, now distribute the product and describe themselves as satisfied with their role as health care providers. Since 2000 in Norway and Sweden the product is available over the counter in pharmacies, in other words the user does not need to ask a pharmacist for the product. According to present information no problem is detected. Until now non-prescription emergency contraception is a success story