

# Availability of Emergency Contraception (EC) for Sexual Assault Patients in Tennessee

## An American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee (ACLU-TN) Fact Sheet

In 2003, 2,114 forcible rapes were reported to Tennessee law enforcement agencies, according to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. Presumably, many more rapes went unreported. Nationwide, an estimated 25,000 U. S. women become pregnant each year following an act of sexual violence, according to a 1996 study published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Emergency contraception (EC) provides a safe and reliable method for preventing pregnancy after sexual assault. However, most emergency care facilities in Tennessee fail to provide sexual assault patients with this essential and effective treatment.

### What is Emergency Contraception (EC)?

EC prevents a pregnancy after unprotected sex, and is simply a high dose form of oral contraceptive pills. EC is sometimes called the "morning after pill" and it is often confused with mifepristone (RU-486).

EC does not cause an abortion and has no effect on an existing pregnancy. EC works like ordinary oral contraceptives and prevents a pregnancy from occurring. EC is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and is commonly known by the brand name Plan B®.

EC reduces the risk of pregnancy by as much as 89% if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex. It is most effective if taken within 12 hours of unprotected sex, but can be effective up to at least 120 hours. However, most experts agree that EC should be taken as soon as possible.

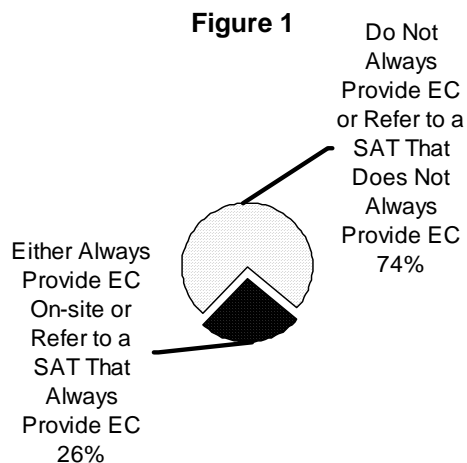
### Survey Methods

ACLU-TN, in conjunction with the Tennessee Women's Health Safety Network, conducted a telephone survey of 126 hospital emergency room departments (ERs) in Tennessee during February and March, 2005, to determine whether EC was being provided to sexual assault patients. The list of ERs was compiled based on information located on the Tennessee state government website ([www2.state.tn.us/health/HCF/Facilities\\_Listings/CurrentResults.asp](http://www2.state.tn.us/health/HCF/Facilities_Listings/CurrentResults.asp)) and based on information provided by the Tennessee Hospital Association (THA). The telephone survey was developed based on surveys previously completed by ACLU affiliates in Pennsylvania, Utah and West Virginia.

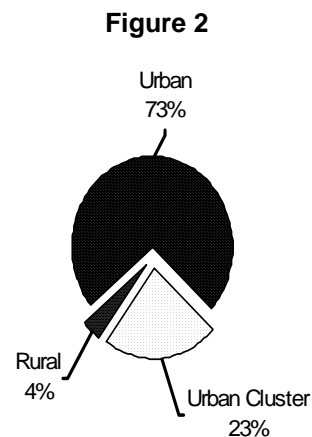
Calls were placed to each of the 126 hospitals with ERs in Tennessee. Four hospitals reported that their services did not include an emergency room department, and one hospital facility was closed. The remaining 121 ERs were contacted up to six times in attempt to gain a response. 101 ERs responded to the survey. Targeted survey respondents included: Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs), staff nurses, charge nurses, nurse managers, clinical supervisors and/or ER directors in order to obtain the most accurate information.

### Findings

The data shows that only 26 ERs in Tennessee always provide EC to sexual assault patients, either on-site or by referring patients to a Sexual Assault Treatment Center (SAT) (Figure 1). Of the 15 SATs, 4 provide EC on-site, 1 offers EC by prescription and 10 do not offer EC. The data also shows that most of these ERs are located in urban areas, making EC more difficult to access for sexual assault patients in rural areas (Figure 2).



Of the 101 hospital ERs surveyed, 26 (26%) either always provide EC on-site to sexual assault patients or always refer to a SAT that provides EC, 75 (74%) do not always provide EC on-site to sexual assault patients or refer to a SAT that does not always provide EC.



Of the 26 hospital ERs that either always provide EC on-site to sexual assault patients or always refer to a SAT that provides EC, 19 (73%) are located in urban areas, 6 (23%) are located in urban clusters, and 1(4%) is located in a rural area. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, urban areas have a population of 50,000 people or more, urban clusters have a population of 2,500 to 49,999, and a rural area has a population of less than 2,500 people.

