

SUPPORT SB1670/HB865 Emergency Care for Rape Victims Act of 2005

Every day, women who have been sexually assaulted seek treatment at emergency care facilities. For these survivors, the risk of pregnancy is a primary concern. Each year, over 300,000 women are raped in the US and approximately 25,000 become pregnant as a result. An estimated 88% of these pregnancies could be prevented if sexual assault survivors had timely access to Emergency Contraception (commonly referred to as 'the morning after pill'). Emergency Contraception (EC) is the *only* contraceptive option for women who have been raped. **House Bill 865 and Senate Bill 1670 would require hospitals to provide to rape survivors with medically and factually accurate oral and written information about EC, let them know about their right to access EC at the hospital, and dispense EC when requested.**

EC in the E.R. – Emergency Care for Rape Victims

- Emergency Contraception is widely recognized as an integral part of comprehensive and compassionate emergency treatment for sexual assault survivors, for whom the risk of pregnancy resulting from rape creates additional emotional trauma.
- Groups such as the American Public Health Association, American College of Emergency Physicians, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists agree that Emergency Contraception should be offered to all victims of sexual assault if they are at risk of pregnancy.
- A July 2002 survey found that a majority of voters in all demographic, partisan and attitudinal subgroups, including more than three quarters of Catholic voters, say they favor legislation that would require hospitals to inform and offer Emergency Contraception to survivors of sexual assault¹.

What is EC?

Emergency Contraception is approved by the Food and Drug Administration as a safe and effective way to dramatically reduce a woman's chance of becoming pregnant after a sexual assault. EC is simply a concentrated combination of regular birth control pills. EC pills contain hormones that reduce the risk of pregnancy when taken up to 120 hours after sexual assault.

There are two products marketed specifically as Emergency Contraception –Preven© (estrogen and progestin) and Plan B© (progestin only). When taken within 72 hours of exposure, Preven© reduces the risk of pregnancy by 75% and Plan B© by 89%. When taken within 24 hours of exposure, Plan B© has been found to reduce the risk of pregnancy by 95%². Time is absolutely critical for a sexual assault survivor.

How does EC work?

Emergency Contraception reduces the risk of pregnancy by slowing or stopping the release of an egg, preventing sperm from reaching the egg, and/or by inhibiting implantation. All of these events would occur *before* the beginning of a pregnancy. According to the US Code of Federal Regulations, pregnancy “encompasses the time between implantation and delivery.”³ EC will not work if a pregnancy has already occurred.

Does EC cause abortion?

Emergency Contraception will not induce an abortion in a woman who is already pregnant. EC *prevents* pregnancy and can help prevent the *need* for abortion when taken within 120 hours of the sexual assault. EC does not induce abortion

¹ RHTP, Hart Research 2002

² Rodriques, *et al*, 2001; TFPMPFR, 1998; Van Look & Stewart, 1998.

³ The United States Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46, Subpart B, Subsection F.

under any circumstance. According to the FDA, EC pills are not effective if the woman is pregnant⁴. If a woman is pregnant prior to taking EC, her pregnancy will not be disrupted in any way and absolutely no harm will occur to the pregnancy.

What's the difference between EC and Medication Abortion (the abortion pill)?

Emergency Contraception helps *prevent* pregnancy; medication abortion *terminates* pregnancy. EC is a high dose of hormonal oral contraceptives, the birth control pills that millions of US women take every day to prevent pregnancy. Methods of contraception, like EC, prevent pregnancy by inhibiting ovulation, fertilization and/or implantation. Conversely, medications used for abortion, such as Mifepristone and Methotrexate, work to terminate an already established pregnancy. They are *not* the same drugs as EC and serve an entirely different purpose.

Emergency Contraception is Compassionate Care for Rape Survivors

In 2003, women in Tennessee reported 2,114 forcible rapes⁵. Many hospitals fail to provide these survivors with Emergency Contraception and some fail to even inform women about its availability. This failure leaves women at risk for becoming pregnant as a result of their assault. When women know about EC and doctors discuss this option with their patients, rape survivors will have more information and more control over their lives and destiny. ***EC is the only contraceptive option for women who have been raped.***



Women's Health Safety Network

The Women's Health Safety Network is a coalition of agencies concerned with making sure that survivors of sexual assault in Tennessee receive the best medical treatment possible. Coalition members include The Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, The American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee, National Council of Jewish Women – Tennessee, Planned Parenthood of Middle and East Tennessee and Memphis Regional Planned Parenthood.

⁴ FDA, 1997

⁵ Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in Tennessee 2003*