

REDUCED EFFECTIVENESS OF EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION PILLS

Health Canada has issued a warning that levonorgestrel emergency contraception products (Plan B, Norlevo, etc) are less effective in women weighing 165 to 176 pounds (75-80 kg), and are not effective in women over 176 pounds (80 kg).¹

Copper IUDs are the only approved alternative for emergency contraception in Canada. There is no evidence that weight affects the contraceptive effect of these devices.² The IUD should be inserted within seven days of unprotected intercourse. It can be removed after the next menstrual period or left in place to provide ongoing contraceptive protection.²

In the United States and several other countries, ulipristal in a single oral dose of 30 mg is approved for emergency contraception. It does not appear to be affected by body weight to the same extent as levonorgestrel: no increase in pregnancy risk for women weighing up to 80 kg; a two-fold increase for women weighing more than 80 kg (compared to a four-fold increase for levonorgestrel).³ Ulipristal is not approved for emergency contraception in Canada and is available only in 5 mg tablets. A single dose of 30 mg of ulipristal would cost about \$75.00 wholesale.

There is no information on the effect of levonorgestrel in doses higher than 1.5 mg for emergency contraception.⁴

If you would like more information on this or any other drug-related issues, please contact medSask (T:1-800-667-3425 or 306-966-6340 in Saskatoon; email drug.info@usask.ca)

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References:

1. Health Canada. Emergency contraceptive pills to carry warnings for reduced effectiveness in women over a certain body weight. Available at <http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2014/38701a-eng.php>. (Accessed March 28, 2014).

2. Ziemer M. Emergency Contraception. In: UpToDate, Post TW (Ed), UpToDate, Waltham, MA. (Accessed on March 28, 2013.).
3. Glasieri A, Cameron ST et al. Can we identify women at risk of pregnancy despite using emergency contraception? Data from randomized trials of ulipristal acetate and levonorgestrel. *Contraception* 2011;84:363.
4. PL Detail-Document, Emergency Contraception: Is It Effective in Heavier Women? Pharmacist's Letter/Prescriber's Letter. January 2014.