



The Massachusetts Emergency Contraception Network **January 2007 Newsletter**

About this newsletter:

This newsletter is prepared and distributed by members of the Massachusetts Emergency Contraception Network. To contribute a news item or remove your name from the newsletter circulation list, please write to: Stacie@prochoicemass.org. We reserve the right to check and edit items as appropriate.

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MASSACHUSETTS

Happy New Year! As the EC Network celebrates the one year anniversary of the Massachusetts EC law going into effect and the recent availability of Plan B over-the-counter, we still have much work ahead. Young women and low-income women in particular still face obstacles in obtaining EC. Your involvement in the EC Network and continued efforts to raise awareness are crucial to our success. Thank you!

1 Mass. EC Network Produces EC Brochures

The EC Network has printed 20,000 EC brochures in English and Spanish to be distributed at no charge to health care and community organizations state-wide. The low-literacy brochures contain information on how EC works and where to get it in Massachusetts. They were developed in conjunction with PATH, a health advocacy organization in Seattle, and printed using funding from the Cox foundation.

Please go to <http://www.massectnetwork.org/forwomen/#materials> to download PDF versions of the brochure or other printable fact sheets.

2 Access to EC Improves for Rape Survivors, But Not All Hospitals in Compliance

A NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts survey of 69 hospital emergency rooms found that the year old law requiring hospitals to offer EC to rape survivors was not always enforced. Almost 15% of the facilities were either leaving it to the doctor's discretion or making provision of EC contingent on undergoing a forensic rape exam. According to Melissa Kogut, executive director of NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts, "Women who have been raped should not have to worry about which hospital they go to."

For more information about the survey please go to:

<http://www.prochoicemass.org/news/ecreport.shtml>

http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2006/12/14/some_hospitals_violate_emergency_contraception_law_survey_says/

AROUND THE US

1 In New York, Medicaid Will Now Cover Plan B Over-the-Counter

In New York starting February 1, 2007, Medicaid will cover Plan B dispensed to women over 18 without a prescription. In many other states, a prescription is still required for Medicaid coverage. New York is one of the first states to remove this barrier to access for low-income women. Women under 18 must still get a prescription. Medicaid will cover up to 6 courses of Plan B per year.

For more information, please see:

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=42507

2 Women's Advocates Urge Passage of Bill to Require All Conn. Hospitals to Provide EC to Rape Survivors

According to Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, a rape counselors' group, only 60% of rape survivors in Connecticut during 2006 were offered EC while in the emergency room. This hesitation by Conn. hospitals has prompted women's advocates to call for a bill that would require hospitals to provide EC as part of rape examinations. According to a representative for the rape counselors group, possible reasons that rape survivors did not receive EC include a lack of awareness among hospital workers that they could provide the pills and a reluctance to give patients the second dose of the drug.

For more information, please see:

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=42381

3 Advocates for Youth Adopt Initiative to Raise Youth Awareness about EC

Advocates for Youth, an organization to help young people make informed decisions about their reproductive and sexual health, has adopted an initiative to raise awareness about EC. Their strategies include collaborating with state-based coalitions, health care providers, and health care educators as well as using the internet to mobilize youth to take an active role in assuring their right to receive EC.

For more information please go to:

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/about/ec.htm>

4 Ohio Wal-Mart Pharmacist Refuses to Sell Plan B

Some women across the country are still having difficulty gaining access to emergency contraception. Despite the federal decision this August to make EC available over-the-counter to any women over 18, certain pharmacists are still refusing to dispense Plan B, citing their moral objections to the product. A pharmacist at a Wal-Mart in Columbus, Ohio refused to sell Plan B to a couple stating he believed in "preserving life." Wal-Mart's policy allows pharmacists that do not feel comfortable dispensing Plan B to refer the customer to another employee for help.

For more information, please see:

<http://www.dispatch.com/news-story.php?story=dispatch/2007/01/15/20070115-A1-02.html>

5 South Carolina EC Initiative Educates Women about Plan B

An organization named the South Carolina Emergency Contraceptive Initiative is working to educate women about Plan B's purpose, availability, and safety. The group encourages women to spread information about Plan B as a contraceptive option. The Emergency Contraceptive Initiative educates the public on what Plan B is, how to access it, and how to use it effectively.

For more information on the Emergency Contraceptive Initiative, please see:

<http://www.thestate.com/mld/thestate/living/health/16429448.htm>

6 Greater Access to EC Increases Use; Does Not Decrease Pregnancy Rate

In a review of 23 studies on EC, researchers found that greater access to EC does increase use, but does not reduce the overall rate of unintended pregnancy. Instead, EC use might encourage women to use their regular contraception more consistently. It also has a significant benefit for individual women. A second study published by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists shows the effect of increased access to EC. After a year's follow up with almost 1500 sexually active women 14-24 years old, they noted a substantial increase in use of emergency contraceptive pills when those pills were readily available. There was no increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases. This study also did not show a decrease in pregnancy rates.

For more information on these studies, please go to:

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=42096

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=41407

WORLDWIDE

1 Catholic Hospitals in Australia Won't Dispense EC to Rape Survivors

Catholic hospitals in Australia refuse to supply rape survivors with emergency contraception. They are also not allowed to refer survivors of sexual assault to crisis centers that offer EC unless "reasonable steps have been taken to exclude the likelihood of pregnancy." The Catholic Church controls 70% of the health facilities in Australia.

For more information, please see:

<http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,21042341-5001021,00.html>

<http://womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3034/context/outrage>

2 As Catholic Influence Weakens, Latin American Governments Attempt to Improve EC Access

Several Latin American countries including Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Argentina, are making EC more accessible by offering it at public hospitals or making it available at no cost. These changes are occurring despite the strong objection of the Catholic Church as more people begin to ignore church teachings on sexuality.

For more information, please go to:

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=42012

3 Chilean Program to Provide EC at No Cost to Girls and Women Is Halted by Constitutional Court

The implementation of a program proposed by Chilean President Michelle Bachelet to provide free emergency contraception to girls as young as 14 was stopped due to a ruling by Chile's Constitutional Court. The court ruled 6-4 that the program was unconstitutional because it was implemented by administrative decree, not presidential decree. The Constitutional Court ruling cannot be appealed and was issued at the request of legislators who strongly oppose emergency contraception as well as abortion rights.

For more information about Chile's EC policy, please see:

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=42216

The Massachusetts Emergency Contraception Network provides a forum for those interested in improving access to and knowledge of emergency contraception - including medical providers, community organizations, and government agencies - to share ideas, coordinate resources, and maximize the impact of our work on the shared public health goal of reducing unintended pregnancies.

For more information concerning the Massachusetts Emergency Contraception Network please contact 617 556 8800 x15, or stacie@prochoicemass.org.