

Plan-B emergency contraception available OTC in Oregon

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Oregon pharmacies are changing the way emergency contraception is dispensed as a result of a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) decision last August. Oregon public health officials believe it is important for women to know about it. "If you're over age 18, emergency contraception can now be purchased as an over-the counter (OTC) pharmacy item," said Katherine Bradley, administrator of family health programs in the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division. "This improved access will help prevent unintended pregnancies." There is extensive research showing that intended pregnancies produce healthier babies and mothers and stronger families. The Public Health Division's family planning program encourages women and men to plan healthy, well-timed and intended pregnancies. The FDA decision is that women and men age 18 and older can now obtain emergency contraception, also known by its brand name, Plan B, without a prescription. Women under age 18 will still need a prescription. Most Oregon retail pharmacies currently stock Plan B and the cost is approximately \$40 for one dose of two pills. Previously, a prescription was needed to purchase emergency contraception, no matter what your age. Obtaining prescriptions and getting them filled created delays in getting the medication, particularly if it was on the weekend. Plan B is most effective when taken 24 to 72 hours after unprotected intercourse, so timely acquisition is critical to its effectiveness. Emergency contraception contains the hormones found in regular birth control pills and has been available since the early 1970s. It is not an abortion pill, but works like other birth control to prevent pregnancy, primarily by suppressing the release of an egg from the ovary. Although it is a safe and effective back-up birth control method that can prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse or if contraception fails, it is not a substitute for regular contraception. Emergency contraception is less effective than regular contraception and doesn't protect against HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. "It is important that women have information and access to contraception," Bradley said. "Almost half of all Oregon pregnancies are unintended and about 40 percent of those pregnancies end in abortion. They can be prevented." The Public Health Division's family planning program helps to ensure that family planning and reproductive health services, including emergency contraception, are available across Oregon. Family planning is one of many public health programs within DHS that focus on prevention and helping people manage their health so they can be as productive and healthy as possible. Additional information about emergency contraception and the DHS family planning program is on the Web at www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/fp/

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