Emergency Contraception in National Essential Medicines Lists

Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECPs) are an essential component of women’s reproductive health. They offer women an important second chance to prevent pregnancy when a regular method fails, no method was used, or sex was forced. Research over the past 30 years has shown that ECPs are safe and effective.

The most recent (April 2015) World Health Organization’s Essential Medicines List (EML) includes one form of ECP, containing levonorgestrel (LNG) as an active ingredient. While other drugs can be used for EC, only the LNG form is listed by the WHO at this time. The WHO list includes two regimen options for LNG ECPs: two tablets of 0.75 milligrams, or one tablet of 1.5 milligrams (mg). (These may also be written as 750 micrograms and 1500 micrograms (µg).) Either regimen can be used; although the two-pill regimen is labeled for the pills to be taken 12 hours apart, the current recommendation is for both pills to be taken together as a single 1.5 mg dose.

A new drug used for emergency contraception, called ulipristal acetate (UPA), is included in one country’s EML but is not included in the WHO EML at this time.

A number of countries have shared their national EMLs on the WHO website1; others have been shared via personal correspondence. Those that include ECPs are listed below, with the year of publication; two countries specify a different method of EC, based on taking a higher dose of regular oral contraceptives (called the “Yuzpe” regimen). The countries whose EMLs are available but do not include EC are also listed. However, the fact that a country does not include EC in its EMLs does not mean there is no product registered or on the market. For those countries with no EC listed in its EML, we have listed whether or not EC is available locally.

Of the 118 countries with available EMLs, 62 countries are known to list ECPs:
6 include only the 1.5 mg dose
12 include both the 1.5 and 0.75 mg doses
38 include only the 0.75 mg dose
1 includes UPA EC
2 include the Yuzpe regimen (high dose of regular oral contraceptives as EC)

56 countries do not include ECPs. Of these, 7 do not include any contraceptives

6 National EMLs are known to include only the 1.5 mg LNG ECP regimen:
- Brazil: 2010
- Cook Islands: 2007
- Ghana: 2010
- Peru: 2010
- Sweden: 2011
- Tunisia: 2008

38 National EMLs are known to include only the 0.75 mg LNG ECP regimen:
- Algeria: 2007
- Armenia: 2010
- Bhutan: 2012
- Bolivia: 2011-2013
- Burkina Faso: 2014
- Cape Verde: 2009
- Chile: 2005
- Dem. Rep. of Congo: 2010
- Dominican Republic: 2005
- Ethiopia: 2015
- Fiji: 2006
- Gabon: Year unknown
- Georgia: 2007
- Haiti: 2012
- Iran: 2009
- Jamaica: 2008
- Kenya: 2010
- Kyrgyzstan: 2009
- Malawi: 2015
- Mali: 2008
- Mexico: 2009
- Nauru: 2010
- Nicaragua: 2009
- Niue: 2006
- Paraguay: 2009
- Rwanda: 2010
- Senegal: 2008
- Seychelles: 2010
- Solomon Islands: 2010
- South Africa: 2008

12 National EMLs are known to include both the 1.5 and 0.75 mg LNG ECP regimens:
Cameroon: 2009
Colombia: 2011
Congo: 2013
Ecuador: 2011
Laos: Year unknown

5 National EMLs are known to include LNG ECPs without specifying indication or dose:
Belize: 2009-2011
Central African Rep.: 2009
China: 2007
Syria: 2008
Ukraine: 2009

2 National EMLs are known to include the Yuzpe regimen (high dose of regular oral contraceptives as EC):
Tanzania: 2013
Zimbabwe 2011

1 National EML is known to include UPA ECPs:
Sweden: 2011

56 National EMLs are known NOT to include ECPs:
Afghanistan: 2007
Angola: 2008 (no contraceptives in EML; no EC product registered, but allows for import with license)
Argentina: 2005 (EC product registered)
Bahrain: 2009
Bangladesh: 2008 (EC product registered)
Barbados: 2011-2012 (EC product registered)
Botswana: 2012 (EC product registered)
Bulgaria: 2009 (EC product registered)
Burundi: 2012 (no EC product registered, but allows for import with license)
Cambodia: 2003 (EC product registered)
Chad: 2007 (no EC product registered, but allows for import with license)
Cote d’Ivoire: Year unknown (EC product registered)
Croatia: 2010 (EC product registered)
Djibouti: 2007 (EC product registered)
Egypt: 2006 (EC product registered)
El Salvador: 2009 (EC product registered)
Eritrea: 2010
Guinea-Conakry: 2013 (EC product registered)
Guyana: 2009-2010
Honduras: 2009-2011
India: 2011 (no contraceptives in EML, but EC product registered)
Indonesia: 2008 (Listed as removed since 2005 edition) (EC product registered)
Iraq: 2010
Jordan: 2009
Kiribati: 2009
Lesotho: 2005 (no contraceptives in EML, but EC product registered)
Macedonia: 2010 (no contraceptives in EML, but EC product registered)
Madagascar: 2008 (EC product registered)
Malaysia: 2008 (EC product registered)
Maldives: 2009
Malta: 2008
Marshall Islands: 2007 (no contraceptives in EML)
Mauritania: 2007 (EC product registered)
Montenegro: 2011 (EC product registered)
Morocco: 2008 (no contraceptives in EML, but EC product registered)
Namibia: 2008 (EC product registered)
Nigeria: 2010 (EC product registered)

North Korea: 1999, list for international agencies (no contraceptives)
Oman: 2009
Palau: 2006
Papua New Guinea: 2002
Philippines: 2008
Poland: 2009 (EC product registered)
Serbia: 2010 (EC product registered)
Slovakia: 2010 (EC product registered)
Slovenia: 2010 (EC product registered)
Somalia: 2006 (no contraceptives in EML)
Timor Leste: 2004
Togo: 2012 (EC product registered)
Tonga: 2007
Trinidad and Tobago: 2010 (EC product registered)
Uruguay: 2011 (EC product registered)
Vanuatu: 2007
Venezuela: 2004 (EC product registered)
Vietnam: 2008 (EC product registered)
Yemen: 2007 (EC product registered)

A note on methodology: ICEC downloaded all the available EMLs from the WHO website in October 2015 and used the “find” function to search for the following key words: levonorgestrel, ulipristal acetate, norgestrel, contraception, and emergency contraception.

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