



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Health Department issues statement on emergency contraception

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In April 2004, the Alabama Department of Public Health began providing emergency contraception (EC) as a routine service. This is a birth control method which has been approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) since 1997.

Alabama is the last state in the Southeast to implement emergency contraception as a standard service. Recently, the American Medical Association endorsed emergency contraceptives receiving over-the-counter status, citing that they are safe, effective and usable across all age groups. Emergency contraception is already available to clients in five states directly from a pharmacy without a clinic or physician visit. In addition, women in Alabama and across the nation are able to receive emergency contraception from their physicians.

If widely available, EC has the potential to prevent an estimated 4,000 abortions in Alabama and an additional 13,000 unintended pregnancies. Emergency contraceptives, otherwise known as morning after pills, should not be confused with RU-486. The Department of Public Health does not issue nor will it issue RU-486, which does cause abortions.

Emergency contraception is simply a high-dosage of routine daily birth control pills. It works like regular birth control pills by preventing ovulation or fertilization or by preventing the implantation of a fertilized egg in the uterine wall.

Use of emergency contraception is not defined by the FDA, the manufacturer, or any other medical source as abortion. EC is not indicated if a woman is already pregnant, but will not harm the pregnancy if inadvertently given. In fact, if a woman is already pregnant, EC will have no effect on her pregnancy.

John Hauth, M.D., chairman, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine, said, "Emergency contraception is a valid option with an action identical to birth control pills—both render the uterus not capable of pregnancy."

Dr. Hauth continued, "Any attempt to link these valid contraceptive techniques with abortion is not accurate and is not based on medical knowledge. Public health policy must support counseling and the availability of emergency contraception, especially for underserved women in Alabama."

Since January 2004, eight nurses have retired or resigned with letters of resignation that listed dispensing emergency contraceptives as at least one of their reasons for leaving. These employees either left without seeking an accommodation or without allowing the department time to resolve their request for accommodation. There are currently five employees who have

requests for accommodations pending. The Alabama Department of Public Health is working with them to find appropriate assignments.

The health department has not terminated the employment nor disciplined any employees based on their religious beliefs regarding contraception.

6/25/04