

*"Fear and anxiety can cause a young girl to misuse the pill;
all she knows is that she does not want to become pregnant."*



COMMENTARY

Contraceptive Controversy: The Morning-After Pill

By Chanelle Liggins

Photos courtesy of Microsoft Office Publisher 2007

If you were a 15-year-old teenage girl and engaged in unprotected sex one night with the fear of becoming pregnant the morning after, what would you do? Sophomore year is approaching and your mother would commit bodily harm to you if she found out you were having sex. There is no one to turn to, your friends aren't having sex, and you have no one to relate to. All of a sudden you remember the Plan B commercial that aired earlier in the week, in a panic you rush to the nearest pharmacy and purchase the Plan B contraceptive pill in hopes that a pregnancy will not be the outcome of your situation.

According to WebMd "Plan B One-Step is a type of emergency contraception. This is birth control that can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. People sometimes call it the morning after pill. But you don't have to wait until the morning after to take it." The pill is now carried over the counter and can be distributed to any woman of childbearing potential without a prescription from a doctor. The cost of this particular contraceptive is \$50 and is located at the pharmacy. If taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex, its job is to prevent ovulation, and change a woman's cervical mucus and uterine lining, making it hard for sperm to reach the uterus and harder for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus. This is not the abortion pill. Side effects include nausea, diarrhea, or stomach pain, dizziness, feeling tired, breast pain or tenderness, changes in your menstrual periods, and headache, according to Drugs.com. Doesn't sound so bad right? Now imagine a girl as young as 11 picking up this drug and purchasing it behind her parents back.

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On June 20, 2013, the FDA made this statement in a news release: "Today, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced it has approved the use of Plan B One-Step as a non-prescription product for all women of child-bearing potential. This action complies with the April 5, 2013 order of the United States District Court in New York to make levonorgestrel – containing emergency contraceptives available as an over-the-counter product without age or point-of-sale restrictions."

What does this mean for youth? What message is this sending to them? Is it OK to go out and have unprotected sex because the "morning-after" pill covers them?

Sydni Murphy, a new parent of a daughter, spoke on the subject saying, "I would be upset that she would go buy it because that means she had unprotected sex." Sex education could be more beneficial if it started in the home at the age where parents notice changes in their child (puberty), some experts say. The subject is touchy for both parties, but is necessary if a

child is to go into the next phase of his or her life prepared to deal with the physical and emotional aspects of sexual activity.

In Maryland, local school boards decide which subjects sex education must cover and the grade level in which topics are introduced, according to sexetc.org. If a 14-year-old wants to engage in sexual activity does he or she have to wait until the local school board is ready to introduce the topic to him/her?

Youth in America are growing up faster now than in year past. Maybe 14 is a little too late. Studies have shown that the average age in which a girl starts her menstrual cycle is 12.

According to Womenshealth.gov, "The average age for a girl to get her first period is 12 years old. This does not mean that all girls start at the same age. A girl can start her period anytime between the ages of 8 and 15," at this age she is of child-bearing potential and can produce a child if she decides to have sex. The dangers of someone younger than 16 partaking in sexual activity are paramount. Fear, and anxiety can cause a girl to misuse the pill.



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Parents should be an essential part of a young girl's decision when taking the Plan B pill. A parent's input can have the potential to ensure better decisions making amongst youth.

Although the easy access of Plan B contraceptives among children can be a scary thought for parents they do offer benefits as well. According to FDA.gov "Over-the-counter access to emergency contraceptive products has the potential further decrease the rate of unintended pregnancies in the United States," said Janet Woodcock, M.D., director of the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. Some might feel that having this pill in pharmacies available for youth is a good idea. According to Fox 45 news clip the following view were shared, "I agree with this being available. Some parents aren't there for their kids, they need to be able to have access to this," said Melanie, a woman interviewed for the piece.



While others oppose the entire idea of the morning-after pill. "Fifteen-year-olds should not have sex. Anyone should know that," Kayla, another woman said. While both statements reflect both sides of the issue, every child's home situation and thought process aren't the same. Some girls may not have an adult that she can reach

out to and talk about what's going on in her life and some might be just too shy or embarrassed about having thoughts about sexual activity. Either way the child isn't wrong: it's all a part of growing up. The Plan B issue is a serious situation in America.

Teenage girls can buy this contraceptive to help stop the possibility of pregnancy without parental consent. Sex sells in this generation and one doesn't have to look extensively before coming across something sexual on social media sites, news broadcasts and daily television content. Proper education among girls can help prevent some detrimental choices that can change their lives forever. With more sex education, hopefully, Plan B pill will not become girls' back up plan.

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