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Levonorgestrel and ulipristal remain suitable emergency contraceptives for all women, regardless of bodyweight

Dear healthcare professional,

I am writing to inform you of the outcome of a recent European review on emergency contraceptives containing levonorgestrel or ulipristal acetate.

Summary

Emergency contraceptives remain suitable for all women regardless of weight or body mass index (BMI) and should be taken as soon as possible after unprotected sexual intercourse or contraceptive failure. A review of available studies on the relationship between increasing body weight or BMI and efficacy of emergency contraceptives considered the data to be inconclusive. Although some studies suggested a possible reduction in efficacy with increasing body weight, other studies showed no such trend; the data are limited and inconclusive. Overall the evidence suggests that emergency contraceptives are suitable for all women regardless of body weight or BMI.

Background

A Europe-wide review was triggered because the product information for one levonorgestrel containing emergency contraceptive approved in the rest of the EU (but not approved in the UK) was amended to suggest that it is less effective with increasing body weight. However, the review of all the available studies conducted with levonorgestrel and ulipristal acetate concluded that the data are not robust enough to establish that there is a reduction in efficacy of emergency contraceptives with increase in weight or BMI.

Advice for healthcare professionals

- Levonorgestrel and ulipristal acetate can be used for emergency hormonal contraception regardless of the woman's weight or BMI.
- Emergency contraceptives should be taken as soon as possible after unprotected sexual intercourse or contraceptive failure.
- Emergency contraceptives do not prevent pregnancy in every instance.
- Emergency contraception is for use, as the name suggests, in an emergency. It should not be used to replace a regular contraceptive method.

- Levonorgestrel containing emergency contraceptives work best if taken within 12 hours of unprotected sexual intercourse or contraceptive failure but can prevent pregnancy if taken up to 3 days afterwards.
- Ulipristal acetate containing contraceptives can prevent pregnancy if taken up to 5 days after unprotected sexual intercourse or contraceptive failure.

Advice to give to women

- Use emergency contraception as soon as possible after unprotected sexual intercourse or failure of a contraceptive method regardless of your weight or BMI.
- Emergency contraceptives should not be used to replace a regular contraceptive method.
- If your period is late or you have irregular bleeding after taking an emergency contraceptive, use a pregnancy test.
- Speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have any concerns about emergency contraceptives.

Yours sincerely,



Keith McDonald
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