What is the ECP?
The emergency contraception pill (ECP) contains a dose of the female hormone progestogen. It can be taken after unprotected sex to reduce the risk of a pregnancy.

How does it work?
The ECP can prevent or delay ovulation if a woman takes it before she ovulates (releases an egg). The ECP does not disrupt an established pregnancy.

Is it safe?
The ECP is very safe and can be taken by almost any woman, regardless of other health conditions or her age. It does not have any impact on future health or fertility.

How do I take the ECP?
It’s best to take the ECP as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of having unprotected sex, but it still works well within 96 hours. You can take it within 96 to 120 hours (five days), but it will not be very effective during this time.

If you vomit within 2 hours of taking it, visit the nearest pharmacy, as you will need to take another dose.

How effective is it?
The ECP is about 85% effective at preventing pregnancies. Effectiveness for individual women depends on what stage they are in their cycle and how soon after unprotected sex that ECP is taken.

If you are taking the ECP because you missed “The Pill” (oral contraceptive pill):
Keep taking your Pill as usual. You will need to use an additional method of contraception such as condoms until you have taken 7 more hormone oral contraceptive pills in a row.

What are the possible side effects?
Bleeding pattern changes may occur. Other side effects are uncommon but occasionally women report headache, nausea and very rarely vomiting. If you are worried about anything, contact your nearest health care practitioner.

When will I have my next period?
For many women the next period will come at the normal time. Most women will get a period within 7 days before or after the expected time.

Do I need a pregnancy test?
It may be necessary to perform a pregnancy test 3-4 weeks after taking the ECP to make sure you are not pregnant, even if you have had bleeding that seems to be your period.

It is essential to check for pregnancy if:
• Your period is more than 7 days late.
• Your next period is light or in any way different from usual including unusual pain.
• You have taken the ECP more than once in the cycle.
• You have started or resumed hormonal contraception pills straight after taking the ECP.
• You were advised by your doctor or pharmacist to have a pregnancy test.

Is it safe to take the ECP when breastfeeding?
It's safe to use ECP when you are breastfeeding. It will not decrease your milk supply. A tiny amount of progestogen may come through the milk, but there is no evidence this harms your baby.

Am I at risk of STIs?
The ECP does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you have a new partner, or if you or your partner has had other partners your risk of STIs is higher. Condoms are the only form of contraception that will reduce the risk of STIs.

Unwanted sex
If you feel you were pressured into having sex at any time and want to talk to someone about this, please contact your State/Territory sexual assault service or your health care practitioner.

And remember...
What about next time?
This can be a good time to update your knowledge and discuss your contraception with your health care practitioner. Information about all methods of contraception is available on the websites and at the clinics of the sexual health and family planning organisations found at www.shfpa.org.au.