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 (March 2011) 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 number of countries have shared their national EMLs on the WHO website; 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 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 EML 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 113 countries with available EMLs, 58 countries are known to list ECPs:
- 5 include only the 1.5 mg dose.
- 36 include only the 0.75 mg dose.
- 11 include both the 1.5 and 0.75 mg doses.
- 4 include LNG but do not specify the dose.
- 2 include the Yuzpe regimen (high dose of regular oral contraceptives as EC).

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

5 National EMLs are known to include only the 1.5 mg ECP regimen:
- Brazil: 2010
- Cook Islands: 2007
- Peru: 2010
- Tunisia: Year unknown
- Ghana: 2010

36 National EMLs are known to include only the 0.75 mg ECP regimen:
- Algeria: 2006
- Armenia: 2010
- Bhutan: 2009
- Bolivia: 2011
- Burkina Faso: 2007
- Burundi: 2009
- Cape Verde: 2009
- Chile: 2005
- Dem. Rep. of Congo: 2010
- Dominican Republic: 2005
- Ecuador: Undated
- Fiji: 2006
- Gabon: Year unknown
- Georgia: 2007
- Iran: 2009
- Jamaica: 2008
- Kenya: 2003
- Kyrgyzstan: 2009
- Malawi: 2009
- Mali: 2008
- Mexico: 2010
- Nauru: 2010
- Niue: 2006
- Paraguay: 2009
- Rwanda: 2010
- Senegal: 2008
- Seychelles: 2010
- Solomon Islands: 2010
- South Africa: 2008
- Sri Lanka: 2009
- Sudan: 2007
- Suriname: 2004
- Sweden: 2004
- Thailand: 2008
- Tuvalu: 2008
- Uganda: 2012
11 National EMLs are known to include both the 1.5 and 0.75 mg ECP regimens:
Belize: 2009-2011
Cameroon: 2009
Congo: 2008
Laos: 2012
Moldova: 2009
Myanmar: Year unknown
Nepal: 2009
Pakistan: 2007
Russia: 2012
St. Vincent & the Grenadines: 2010
Tajikistan: 2009

4 National EMLs are known to include LNG ECPs without specifying indication or dose:
Central African Rep.: 2009
China: 2009
Syria: 2008
Ukraine: 2009

2 National EMLs are known to include only the Yuzpe regimen (high dose of regular oral contraceptives as EC):
Tanzania: 2007
Zimbabwe: 2006

55 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)
Bangladesh: 2008 (EC product registered)
Barbados: 2011 (EC product registered)
Bulgaria: 2009 (EC product registered)
Cambodia: 2003 (EC product registered)
Chad: 2007 (no EC product registered, but allows for import with license)
Colombia: 2011 (no contraceptives in EML, but EC product registered)
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: 2011 (EC product registered)
Eritrea: 2010
Ethiopia: 2010 (EC product registered)
Guyana: 2009
Haiti: National Strategic Plan for Health, 2003-2008
Honduras: 2009-11
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 (no contraceptives in EML)
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 (EC product registered)
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)
Nicaragua: year unknown
(EC product registered)
Nigeria: 2003 (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)
Somalia: 2007 (no contraceptives in EML)
Timor Leste: 2004
Togo: 2006 (EC product registered)
Tonga: 2007
Trinidad: 2010 (EC product registered)
Uruguay: 2011 (EC product registered)
Vanuatu: 2007
Venezuela: 2004 (EC product registered)
Yemen: 2007 (EC product registered)

A note on methodology: ICEC downloaded all the available EMLs from the WHO website in December 2012 and used the “find” function to search for the following key words: levonorgestrel, norgestrel, contraception, and emergency contraception.