

Sample Q&A

Below is a sample Q&A for use—and further tailoring—by advocates:

Q: What is emergency contraception?

A: Emergency contraception is a medication that can be taken in the hours and days after intercourse to prevent a pregnancy from taking place. The two most common forms of emergency contraception are Plan B One-Step[®] (brand name which is available over the counter) and ella[®] (brand name which is currently prescription only in most states, unless a state has a standing order).

Q: Does emergency contraception cause abortion?

A: Emergency contraception pills are not abortifacients. Where abortifacients terminate an already established pregnancy, emergency contraception works by preventing a pregnancy before it begins.

Q: Isn't Plan B One-Step[®] already available over the counter? Why isn't that good enough?

A: While Plan B One-Step[®] is currently available over the counter, Plan B One-Step[®] isn't the right form of emergency contraception for everyone. In fact, there are a number of reasons why an individual might want to take ella[®], another form of emergency contraception, instead. For example, ella[®] would be the preferred emergency contraception for people who weigh more than 165 pounds, have a BMI of greater than 25, are closer to time of ovulation, or if more than 72 hours has elapsed since intercourse. And, you need to get a prescription from your provider in order to get insurance coverage for Plan B One-Step[®]. Without it, which is likely in the case of an emergency, you have to pay out of pocket.

Q: What is a standing order?

A: A standing order is a document issued by a physician or prescriber that authorizes certain parties to dispense medication under certain conditions. Think of it like a standing prescription for a certain medication. Examples of standing orders from everyday life include the standing order that authorizes pharmacists to give flu vaccines without needing a prescription from each individual's doctor. Similarly, the widespread roll out of the COVID-19 vaccination was made possible because of a standing order.

Q: What would a statewide emergency contraception standing order do?

A: The statewide emergency contraception standing order would allow pharmacists to dispense *both* Plan B One-Step[®] and ella[®] to people without requiring them to get a prescription from their provider first.

Q: Is it safe for pharmacists to dispense emergency contraception?

A: Yes, emergency contraception is incredibly safe and can be dispensed safely by pharmacists. In fact, when Massachusetts implemented its statewide standing order it made the pharmacists

training component optional rather than mandatory, because pharmacists are already equipped to offer consultations and dispense medications.

Q: Why is a statewide standing order necessary?

A: It's called emergency contraception for a reason. It's unreasonable and unrealistic to expect people to set up an appointment, speak with their doctor, and get the prescription they need in a timely enough manner to ensure the medication is most effective (within 72 to 120 hours). The way we dispense this care needs to align with the needs of those who access it. A statewide standing order ensures that people can get the medication they need in a timely manner by ensuring pharmacists can dispense both types of emergency contraception.

While some states may allow pharmacists to obtain a standing order, standing orders are not always simple to obtain. Oftentimes, a pharmacist must take a course on emergency contraception, get permission from their employer to take time to take the course, find a provider to sign a standing order, file the standing order at the pharmacy and with the Department of Public Health, and refile annually. A standing order makes it so that pharmacists do not have to take all of these steps: instead, pharmacists *may* take a class on emergency contraception and are required to report annually.

Q: Is it safe to dispense emergency contraceptives through a vending machine?

A: Only emergency contraceptives available over-the-counter would be dispensed in vending machines. Emergency contraception is incredibly safe, having been FDA approved in 1998. Plan B One-Step[®] and other LNG-based emergency contraception has been sold over-the-counter (OTC) to women aged 18 and older since 2006, and available over the counter *regardless of age* since 2013. There's no reason for state statute to restrict the availability of a medication already regulated by the FDA—over-the-counter medications like Advil[®] and Tylenol[®] are routinely found for sale in vending machines. Having vending machines with Plan B One-Step[®] and its generic equivalents is perfectly safe and increases the number or access points for people in need.