



**The Difference Between Emergency Contraception  
and Early Abortion Options (Mifepristone/RU 486)**

The line between contraception and abortion is often blurred, intentionally and unintentionally, in the course of policy discussions about emergency contraception (also known as the “morning-after” pill) and the early-abortion option, mifepristone (also known as RU 486). The distinction between the two is important, especially since anti-choice lawmakers are trying to restrict women’s access to these and other reproductive-health services. The chart below sets out the differences between these two very different drugs.

	<b>EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION</b>	<b>MIFEPRISTONE/RU 486</b>
<b>Function</b>	<i>Prevents</i> a pregnancy after sex <sup>1</sup>	<i>Terminates</i> an existing pregnancy
<b>Time Frame</b>	Effective if taken within <i>days</i> after unprotected sex <sup>2</sup> or primary contraceptive failure	Approved by the FDA to terminate pregnancies of up to <i>seven weeks</i> in duration <sup>3</sup>
<b>Brand Name</b>	Plan B <sup>®</sup>	Mifeprex <sup>®</sup>
<b>Contents</b>	The same active ingredients as ordinary birth-control pills <sup>4</sup>	The drug mifepristone, which is taken in combination with another drug, misoprostol <sup>5</sup>
<b>FDA Safety Ruling</b>	FDA-approved as safe and effective for <i>pregnancy prevention</i> after sex <sup>6</sup>	FDA-approved as safe and effective for <i>pregnancy termination</i> <sup>7</sup>
<b>AMA Policy</b>	The American Medical Association (AMA) supports over-the-counter access to emergency contraception for women of all ages. <sup>8</sup>	The American Medical Association (AMA) supports the legal availability of mifepristone (RU 486) for appropriate research, and if indicated, clinical practice. <sup>9</sup>

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Robert A. Hatcher et al., EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION: THE NATION'S BEST KEPT SECRET 29-30 (1995); American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists (ACOG), Statement on Contraceptive Methods (July 1998). In fact, EC does not work if a woman is already pregnant.
- <sup>2</sup> While labels for FDA-approved emergency contraception indicate that EC should be used within 72 hours after unprotected sex, recent research shows that emergency contraception can be effective up to 120 hours after sex. However, EC is more effective the sooner it is taken. Helena von Hertzen et al., *Low Dose Mifepristone and Two Regimens of Levonorgestrel for Emergency Contraception: a WHO Multicentre Randomized Trial*, 360 THE LANCET 1803-10 (2002); Charlotte Ellertson et al., *Extending the Time Limit for Starting the Yuzpe Regimen of Emergency Contraception to 120 Hours*, 101 OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY 1168-71 (2003); Gilda Piaggio et al., *Timing of Emergency Contraception with Levonorgestrel or the Yuzpe Regimen*, 353 THE LANCET 721 (1999).
- <sup>3</sup> Press Release, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Food & Drug Administration, *FDA Approves Mifepristone for the Termination of Early Pregnancy* (Sept. 28, 2000).
- <sup>4</sup> Charlotte Ellertson et al., *Extending the Time Limit for Starting the Yuzpe Regimen of Emergency Contraception to 120 Hours*, 101 OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY 1168, 1168-71 (2003); Helena von Hertzen et al., *Low Dose Mifepristone and Two Regimens of Levonorgestrel for Emergency Contraception: a WHO Multicentre Randomised Trial*, 360 THE LANCET 1803, 1803-10 (2002); Gilda Piaggio et al., *Timing of Emergency Contraception with Levonorgestrel or the Yuzpe Regimen*, 353 THE LANCET 721 (1999).
- <sup>5</sup> Press Release, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Food & Drug Administration, *FDA Approves Mifepristone for the Termination of Early Pregnancy* (Sept. 28, 2000).
- <sup>6</sup> Press Release, Women's Capital Corporation, *A New Generation of Emergency Contraception Has Arrived* (July 28, 1999).
- <sup>7</sup> Press Release, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Food & Drug Administration, *FDA Approves Mifepristone for the Termination of Early Pregnancy* (Sept. 28, 2000).
- <sup>8</sup> American Medical Association, National Advisory Council on Violence and Abuse, "Access to Emergency Contraception," H-75.985, *Policy Compendium* (2008).
- <sup>9</sup> American Medical Association, "RU -486 Availability," H-5.991(Adopted 1990; Last Amended 1999).