

To the attention of  
Board Chairperson  
Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology /  
Japan Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecology

August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020

We are pleased to write to you on behalf of the European Consortium for Emergency Contraception and the International Consortium for Emergency Contraception, in order to participate in the process of rethinking ways to improve access to emergency contraception pills in Japan, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

The mission of the European Consortium for Emergency Contraception (ECEC) is to expand knowledge about and access to emergency contraception (EC) in European countries and to promote the standardization of EC service delivery in the European context. ECEC is the European branch of the International Consortium for Emergency Contraception, which shares the same mission at the global level. ICEC and ECEC collaborate with the World Health Organization, and follow and disseminate its recommendations. ICEC also collaborates with FIGO, elaborating up-to-date and evidence-based guidelines for clinical practice.

With our participation in this process, we want to share with you the recommendations issued by international authoritative sources during the times of the pandemic, regarding access to EC, for your consideration.

- The UK Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare, issued on March 2020 *Essential Services in Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare*. See <https://www.fsrh.org/documents/fsrh-position-essential-srh-services-during-covid-19-march-2020/>. EC (oral and, where possible, fitting copper intrauterine device - IUD) is included in the list of sexual and reproductive health services considered essential during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- On April 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) proposed the use of emergency contraception (EC), and other self-care methods, if access to regular methods is disrupted (*Contraception/Family planning and COVID-19*). WHO also recalls that EC pills can prevent up to 95% of pregnancies when taken within 5 days after intercourse, and that they can be taken by anyone with or without a health condition. WHO also suggests policy makers to “ensure access to emergency post-coital contraception, including consideration of over the counter provision.” The full WHO document is available here: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/contraception-family-planning-and-covid-19>. In addition, since 2010 WHO has recognized that the LNG ECP regimen (the only one available in Japan) is simple to follow, and that medical supervision is not necessary for correct use. It is approved for over-the-counter or non-prescription use in many countries. Research demonstrated that both young and adult women

find the label and instructions easy to understand. See: [https://www.cecinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ICEC\\_WHO-Safety-Statement\\_2010-english.pdf](https://www.cecinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ICEC_WHO-Safety-Statement_2010-english.pdf)

- The statement issued in April by the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) points at key actions to ensure access to contraception services and supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. FIGO's statement is based in the notion that contraception services and supplies are core components of essential health services and access to these is a fundamental human right. Among others, these key action points include pro-actively promoting and supplying self-care contraception methods, including emergency contraception. The FIGO statement can be found here: <https://www.figo.org/covid-19-contraception-family-planning>
- And last, but not least, the American Society for Emergency Contraception (ASEC) has also stressed the importance of ensuring access to EC in the current times, promoting advanced provision of EC pills. See ASEC's statement, published last May: <https://www.ec-ec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ASEC-EC-in-the-COVID-19-Era.pdf>

The European Consortium for Emergency Contraception, a partner organization of the European Society of Contraception and Reproductive Health, stands behind and supports all the above recommendations. The International Consortium for Emergency Contraception also calls on countries to implement these recommendations.

The organization that you chair has the potential to play a crucial role to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's and couple's reproductive health and lives, and to advance reproductive rights. Removing the mandatory prescription for EC pills would tremendously improve accessibility to this contraceptive method, the only one that provides a second chance to prevent pregnancy. Your valued opinion on this matter, could improve the life and well-being of millions of women in Japan. In fact, a number of countries that had historically been reluctant to make EC easily accessible, such as Costa Rica, [Malta](#), [Italy](#) or [Andorra](#), have made important changes in the past five years, to allow the sale of EC directly from the pharmacies. Other countries like the [UK](#) have also reduced the price of EC pills to overcome financial barriers.

Japan is currently one of the very few developed nations in the world that still require a medical prescription for LNG EC (along with Poland and Hungary), and one of the countries where the relative cost of EC is higher. We would like to encourage the Society you chair to undertake advocacy efforts to remedy this situation, in order to improve the quality of life of the women you so profoundly care for.

We hope our comments are valuable, and remain at your disposal to provide any additional information or support. We thank you for your time and attention.

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