

Wondering about

birth control?

416.338.7600 | toronto.ca/health

 **Toronto** Public Health

Wondering about birth control?

Do you want to learn about the ways to reduce the chances of an egg and sperm meeting and causing a pregnancy? Are you wondering what birth control options are available and how they work? If so, this pamphlet may help because it contains basic information about birth control.

If you identify as transgender, you may have specific reproductive concerns and may wish to consult an LGBT-friendly health care provider.

In this pamphlet, we use “sex” to refer to sexual intercourse, vaginal intercourse or frontal sex. We also use vagina, penis and breast. Some people use other words to suit their identities and culture. We respect the use of other words.

Safer sex

Sex can be fun and pleasurable. However, worrying about unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) may lessen sexual pleasure. Using methods described in this pamphlet may help to prevent unwanted pregnancy and STIs, and may make sex more enjoyable.

Condoms are the only method that protect against unplanned pregnancy **and** STIs including HIV. If you want to stop using condoms, talk to your partner(s), get tested for STIs and choose another form of birth control. Free testing for STIs and pregnancy can be done at any sexual health clinic.



Contents

Birth control options to be used:

Before sex	3
Everyday	7
Once a week	8
Once a month	9
Every three months	10
Every few years	11
With body awareness	13
When you want to rely on breastfeeding	14
If you want a permanent option	15
After sex	16
If pregnancy does occur	18
More information	19
Sexual Health Clinics	19





External Condom (also known as the condom/male condom)

What is it?

This condom is a disposable tube-shaped latex or non-latex cover used on the erect penis during sex. It catches semen to prevent it from entering the vagina. It is removed after sex.

How effective is it?

The external condom is 85% to 98% effective at preventing pregnancy.

This condom works best if it is used on the erect penis before and during sex every time. It breaks less frequently if there is extra oil-free lubricant on the outside. Lubricant inside and outside the condom may make sex more pleasurable for both partners.

Where can I get it?

This condom is available to purchase at some drug stores and supermarkets. Some sexual health clinics give them away for free.



Internal Condom (also known as the female condom)

What is it?

This condom is a disposable non-latex lubricated pouch inserted into the vagina before sex to catch semen, so the semen cannot enter the vagina. It is removed after sex.

How effective is it?

The internal condom is 79% to 95% effective at preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get it?

This condom is available at some drug stores. Some sexual health clinics give them away for free.



Spermicides and the sponge

What are they?

Spermicides are chemicals that kill or weaken sperm. They come in many forms including gel, film or foam. The Today Sponge is a foam device containing spermicide. Spermicides and the sponge are both inserted into the vagina before sex. Each method has specific instructions for use.

How effective are they?

Spermicides and the sponge used alone are 68% to 82% effective at preventing pregnancy. Spermicides are more effective when used with a condom. Some spermicides contain nonoxynol-9 which may irritate the vagina, cause yeast infections and could increase the chances of getting an STI including HIV.

Where can I get them?

The Today Sponge and Vaginal Contraceptive Film (VCF) or foam can all be purchased over the counter at drug stores. Spermicides that do not contain nonoxynol-9, Contragel and Caya gel, are available through some natural health practitioners and online.



Diaphragm and Cervical Cap

What are they?

The Diaphragm and Cervical Cap are reusable barrier methods, used with spermicide. Each method, inserted into the vagina before sex, blocks the cervix so sperm cannot enter the uterus, and is left in the vagina for 6-8 hours after sex.

How effective are they?

The diaphragm and cervical cap used with spermicide are 84% to 94% effective at preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get them?

Some options that are available in Canada are Fem Cap (cervical cap) and Caya (diaphragm). These options may be available through your health care provider, natural health practitioner or online.



The Birth Control Pill (also known as “the pill” or oral contraceptives)

What is it?

The birth control pill (BCP) is a small tablet taken daily to prevent pregnancy. It contains hormones (estrogen and progestin together or just progestin). It typically stops the ovaries from releasing an egg every month and makes the cervical mucus thicker so it is harder for sperm to get into the uterus. The BCP comes in packs with 21, 28 or 91 pills.

People taking the pill with estrogen and progestin will have a menstrual period when the pills with hormones are stopped. With the progestin only pill, there are no hormone/pill free days and users may experience unpredictable periods.

How effective is it?

The BCP is 92% to 99% effective at preventing pregnancy. Pregnancy may occur if one or more hormone pills are missed. The pill works best when taken at the same time every day.

Where can I get it?

A prescription from a health care provider is needed before purchasing BCP from the drug store. The BCP can be prescribed and purchased at a sexual health clinic.



The Patch (Evra)

What is it?

The patch is a thin, flexible, beige square that sticks to the skin like an adhesive bandage. It delivers hormones (estrogen and progestin) directly through the skin into the bloodstream. The user changes the patch once a week for three weeks and then leaves it off for the fourth week. This is the week when a menstrual period will occur. This cycle is repeated every month.

The hormones in the patch stop the ovaries from releasing an egg every month, and make the cervical mucus thicker so that it is harder for sperm to get into the uterus.

How effective is it?

The patch is 92% to 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get it?

A prescription from a health care provider is needed before buying the patch from the drug store. The patch can be prescribed and purchased at a sexual health clinic.



The Ring (NuvaRing)

What is it?

This flexible ring contains hormones (estrogen and progestin). Every month, the user inserts it into the vagina, and leaves it there for three weeks. At the beginning of the fourth week the user removes it. This is the week when a menstrual period will occur. This cycle is repeated every month.

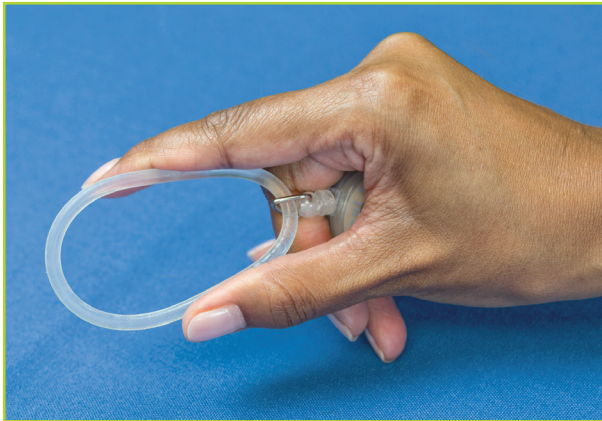
The hormones in the ring stop the ovaries from releasing an egg every month, and make the cervical mucus thicker so that it is harder for sperm to get into the uterus.

How effective is it?

The ring is 92% to 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get it?

A prescription from a health care provider is needed before buying the ring from the drug store. The ring can be prescribed and purchased at a sexual health clinic.



Depo-Provera (also known as “the shot” or depo)

What is it?

This is an injection of a hormone (progestin) that is given by a health care provider every three months. The hormone stops the ovaries from releasing an egg every month, and makes cervical mucus thicker to make it harder for sperm to get into the uterus.

How effective is it?

Depo-Provera is 97% to 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get it?

A health care provider prescribes and gives the injection. Depo-Provera can be prescribed and given at most sexual health clinics.



Intrauterine Device (IUD)

What is it?

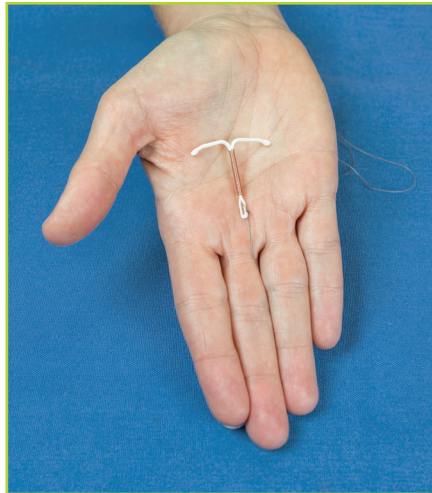
The IUD is a T-shaped piece of plastic covered in copper that fits inside the uterus. Copper decreases the sperm's ability to fertilize an egg and may stop a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus. Depending on the type of IUD, it can remain inside the uterus for five years or ten years, but can be removed by a health care provider at any time.

How effective is it?

The IUD is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get it?

The IUD can be prescribed and inserted at many sexual health clinics.



Intrauterine System (IUS)

What is it?

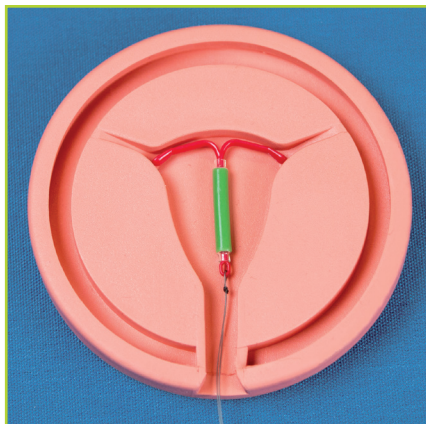
An IUS is a T-shaped piece of plastic containing a hormone (progestin) that fits inside the uterus. The hormone makes cervical mucus thicker to help prevent sperm from getting inside the uterus, changes the lining of the uterus and may prevent the ovaries from releasing an egg. Although it can remain inside the uterus for three years (Jaydess) or five years (Mirena, Kyleena), it can be removed by a health care provider at any time.

How effective is it?

The IUS is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get it?

A health care provider prescribes and inserts the IUS. An IUS can be prescribed and inserted at many sexual health clinics. Jaydess, Kyleena and Mirena are three options available in Canada.



Withdrawal (also known as “pulling out”)

What is it?

To use the withdrawal method, the penis is removed from the vagina just before ejaculation to prevent semen from entering the vagina during sex.

How effective is it?

The withdrawal method is 73% to 96% effective at preventing pregnancy. Knowing when to pull out before ejaculation may take practice.

Fertility Awareness Methods

What are they?

Fertility awareness methods use an understanding of the menstrual cycle and the changes in the cervical mucus to identify ovulation and the most fertile days when pregnancy can occur. To reduce the risk of pregnancy during these fertile days, consider not having sex, use a condom during sex or use the withdrawal method.

How effective are they?

These methods are 75% to 97% effective at preventing pregnancy.

A fertility awareness course may increase the effectiveness of these methods. Some sexual health clinics may provide information about fertility awareness.

There are also some helpful devices and internet applications to help identify the approximate time of ovulation when pregnancy may occur.

Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM)

What is it?

LAM is a method that uses breastfeeding (also known as chestfeeding) to prevent ovulation. To use this method, ALL of the following conditions must apply:

- baby is less than six months old
- baby is fully or nearly fully breastfed
- breastfeeding is frequent, at least every four hours, not going longer than one six hour stretch without breastfeeding within a 24 hour period
- monthly menstrual periods have not returned

If any of the above conditions are not met, another method of contraception is needed to prevent pregnancy.

How effective is it?

LAM is 98% effective at preventing pregnancy for up to six months postpartum if all four conditions apply. Speak to your health care provider for more information about LAM and other birth control options that can be used when breastfeeding.

Sterilization

What is it?

Sterilization is a permanent method of birth control. It involves cutting or blocking the reproductive tubes.

Vasectomy

For people with external reproductive organs (penis and testicles), a doctor cuts or blocks the vas deferens, the tubes that carry the sperm from the testicles to the penis. This does not affect erections or ejaculations.

Tubal Ligation

For people with internal reproductive organs (uterus and vagina), a doctor cuts or blocks the fallopian tubes, so the egg cannot be reached by the sperm to be fertilized.

How effective is it?

Both vasectomy and tubal ligation are over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get it?

Vasectomy is performed in a doctor's office or hospital and tubal ligation is performed in a hospital.

Emergency methods are available if no method was used (including sexual assault), a method was used incorrectly (like missed pills), or a method failed (like a condom broke) and pregnancy is not wanted right now.

Emergency IUD

What is it?

It is a copper IUD that is inserted up to 7 days after sex to prevent pregnancy. (See previous section on the IUD)

How effective is it?

A copper IUD may reduce the risk of pregnancy after unprotected sex by approximately 99%. The copper IUD is the most effective form of emergency contraception and does not depend on body weight.

Where can I get it?

A health care provider prescribes and inserts this IUD. An IUD can be prescribed and inserted at many sexual health clinics.

Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP)

What is it?

Emergency contraceptive pills are small tablets that contain hormones (progestin) or medication (ulipristal) that temporarily prevent the release of an egg from the ovaries.

How effective is it?

ECP may reduce the risk of pregnancy by approximately 75%-85%. The effectiveness depends on how soon you take the pills, the type of pills, and at what point in the menstrual cycle the pills are taken. ECPs must be taken within five days after sex, and many are most effective the sooner they are taken after sex, with effectiveness decreasing with each passing day.

Progestin-only ECPs (i.e., Plan B) are less effective for people who weigh more than 75 kg (165 lbs) and MAY NOT be effective for people who weigh more than 80 kg (176 lbs).

Ulipristal ECP (i.e., Ella) may be affected by height and weight. Speak to your health care provider.

Where can I get it?

The brands available in Canada include: Plan B, Norlevo, Option 2 and Next Choice, and Ella. Ella requires a prescription from a physician or nurse practitioner. Others are available over the counter in drug stores, but they might be behind the counter and assistance from a pharmacist might be needed. Plan B and Ella are available at sexual health clinics. Some people keep ECP at home in case of emergency.

If an unintended pregnancy occurs, there are three options, listed below in alphabetical order:

Abortion

To end a pregnancy, abortion is either a medical or surgical procedure. Abortion can be performed at an abortion clinic or a hospital.

Abortions are free with an Ontario Health Card but some clinics charge an administrative fee. For more information about abortions and where to go, call the AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine 416-392-2437.

Adoption

If the decision is to continue the pregnancy and make an adoption plan, seek prenatal care and call the Adoption Council of Ontario at 416-482-0021 or 1-877-ADOPT20 for more information.

Parenting

If the plan is to continue the pregnancy, seek prenatal care, go to **toronto.ca/health/pregnancy** or call Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 to find out about the maternal and infant health services that are available in Toronto.

More information

To get information about the pros and cons of birth control options and possible side effects, and to decide which method is right for you, ask a health care provider or visit a sexual health clinic.

To learn if or when it is the right time to have a baby, you may want to visit the Reproductive Life Plan website: toronto.ca/health/preconception.

Sexual Health Clinics

Sexual health clinics offer free and confidential services including: birth control, STI testing and free treatment, pregnancy testing/counselling and referral, emergency contraceptive methods, HIV testing and free condoms.

Sexual health clinics are located across the city. Call the AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine at 416-392-2437 or visit toronto.ca/health/sexualhealth to find a location near you.



PH1805GB1592

416.338.7600 | toronto.ca/health

 **Toronto** Public Health