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California's Adolescents Face Barriers to Emergency Contraception at Pharmacies Despite Strong Access Rights

Although California has strong laws in place affording minors access to emergency contraception, many are wrongly denied access at pharmacies because of their age.

Teens under the age of 18 are prevented from purchasing levonorgestrel emergency contraception (EC) over the counter in about half of community pharmacies surveyed in California according to a new study from the Center on Reproductive Health, Law, and Policy at UCLA School of Law.

The study, conducted using data from the 2022 California Pharmacist Survey, sheds light on the disparities minors face when obtaining emergency contraception, a crucial resource for preventing unintended pregnancies among adolescents.

Results show that among community pharmacists who reported that their pharmacy provided levonorgestrel EC without an outside provider's prescription, one in four reported that their pharmacy either (wrongly) required parental consent for purchase by a minor (13%) or did not provide EC to minors regardless of parental consent (12%). Further, one third (32.6%) believed that emergency contraception should only be available to minors with parental consent.

“These study's findings emphasize the urgent need to eliminate barriers and ensure every young person in California has access to timely and affordable emergency contraception,” said study author Cathren Cohen, Staff Attorney at the Center on Reproductive Health, Law, and Policy at UCLA Law. “Solutions including educating pharmacists and community pharmacy operators on minors' rights to access EC under state law are essential to realizing the potential for pharmacies to serve as key access points for sexual and reproductive health services.”

[Read the report.](#)

The Center on Reproductive Health, Law, and Policy at UCLA Law is a think tank and interdisciplinary research center created to meet the current national crisis in access to abortion while working towards long-term solutions to advance reproductive justice.