Plan B is only a vending machine away

By ACSH Staff — February 8, 2012

Instead of trekking to the pharmacy, students at Shippensburg University in central Pennsylvania can now purchase the morning-after pill from a campus vending machine. Located in a private room in the school’s health center, the vending machine provides the Plan B One Step emergency contraceptive, in addition to condoms and pregnancy tests.

The vending machine was installed at the request of the student government after a school-wide survey found that 85 percent of students supported having emergency contraception available through this program. Plan B, when taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex, protects against pregnancy by up to 89 percent. But the pill is most effective when taken within 24 hours, so increasing accessibility is important. Given that the morning-after pill is already available over-the-counter to anyone age 17 or older, the college’s decision to stock the vending machine with it seems reasonable. All of the school’s students are at least 17 years-old and the health center is accessible only to students thus only individuals who are of age will have access to this vending machine.

ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross applauds this effort; he believes that this should become standard operating procedure for all campuses that include women over 17.

Although some people may oppose making emergency contraception so readily accessible, for fear of overuse, ACSH’s Lana Spivak points out that the pill’s cost ($25 at the school’s vending machine, but even more expensive at the drugstore) is certainly too pricey for any woman to consider using as a regular form of birth control.

Furthermore, ACSH’s Dr. Josh Bloom notes, No one is going to want to take this pill any more than is absolutely necessary. There are side effects, such as nausea and vomiting; I think the risk of abuse is extremely low.

ACSH’s Alyssa Pelish also points out that, in order to ease concerns about young women purchasing this drug without first consulting a doctor, ob-gyns should talk about the risks and benefits of the morning-after pill with patients during their regular check-ups that way, women will be be able to make an informed decision when they need to do so.
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