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HEALTH
SECTION E

TROPICAL LIFE

RX: MEDICAL NEWS

5 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ... EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

1 Emergency contraception, sold under the brand name Plan B, is "the best-kept secret in all of health care," says Carol Cohan, director of the Women's Emergency Network. About a year and a half ago it was approved for over-the-counter sales in the United States, but advertising was focused on "glossy magazines like Vogue, targeting college age, young professional women and missing low-income women of color, who have the highest rate of unplanned pregnancies in the United States."

2 The South Florida Coalition to Promote Emergency Contraception is working to get the message out to those who need it most, through a new ad campaign promoting Plan B, which is backup birth control. Images of an emergency box with a pill inside will be placed on billboards, bus cards and fliers in areas of Miami-Dade County that are populated with low-income people of color.

3 Plan B is sold behind the counter at many drug stores. "Our awareness campaign drives viewers to www.ecnow.org, which lists Miami-area drug stores that tend to carry the product," Cohan says. Outside of Miami-Dade, call your pharmacist to see Plan B is in stock. You must be 18 or older to get it without a prescription. Men can buy it. Girls under 18 can get it with a prescription without parental notification. The website lists

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION
IS AVAILABLE WITHOUT A PRESCRIPTION.VISIT WWW.ECNOW.ORG OR CALL 1-888-NOT-2-LATE.
Emergency Contraception does not protect against HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. Emergency Contraception can be used up to 72 hours, but the earlier it is used, the more effective it is at preventing pregnancy.

one-stop-shop clinics where girls can get the prescription. Another resource: 888-not-2-late.

4 Plan B is most effective if taken immediately after sex when/if the condom breaks, you miss your birth control pill or you're late for a Depo-Provera shot. So, it's good to have it on hand before it's needed. Side effects include vomiting, abdominal cramps and headaches. It can change the time of month when a woman is fertile, so after taking it, birth control must be used on a consistent basis.

5 "Emergency contraception is not an abortion," Cohan says. Unlike the abortion pill, RU486, Plan B "will not work if you are already pregnant and it will not harm a developing fetus," she says. It impedes ovulation or fertilization, not implantation. The Archdiocese of Connecticut consents to having Catholic hospitals provide emergency contraception for rape survivors without requiring an ovulation test.

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