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Coverage
Great Britain
Theme
Health and Care

Greater use of pharmacies to access the 'morning after pill'

Since 2003/04, the proportion of women obtaining emergency contraception from chemists or pharmacies has almost doubled according to a report* published today by the Office for National Statistics.

The report shows the proportion of women obtaining the 'morning after pill' from a chemist or pharmacy increased from 27 per cent in 2003/04 to 50 per cent in 2004/05, making chemists or pharmacists the most popular source for obtaining the 'morning after pill'. Emergency contraception became available, without a prescription, from community pharmacies in January 2001

Over the same period the proportion of women obtaining the 'morning after pill' from the woman's own GP or practice nurse fell from 41 per cent in 2003/04 to 33 per cent in 2004/05 and the proportion obtaining it from a walk in centre or minor-injuries unit fell from 11 per cent to 3 per cent. The proportion of women obtaining the 'morning after pill' from a family planning clinic remained stable at 21 per cent.

Condom failure was mentioned by over two fifths (46 per cent) of women who used the 'morning after pill' during the last year as the reason for having used it.

Overall, seven per cent of women had used the 'morning after pill' in the year prior to interview, a similar proportion to that observed in previous years.

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This report presents the results of a survey for the Department of Health carried out in 2004/05 as part of the National Statistics Omnibus Survey. Questions on contraceptive use and sexual health were asked of women aged under 50 and men aged under 70.

Reports have also been published with the results of seven previous surveys conducted in 1997/98, 1998/99, 1999/2000, 2000/01, 2001/02, 2002/03 and 2003/04. This report includes an examination of any significant changes in the data between 2003/04 and 2004/05. It broadly confirms the key findings from the previous six reports, which have shown stability in the use of contraception. Other key statistics from the report include:

Contraceptive use among women aged under 50

Over half (53 per cent) of all women aged 16-49 reported that they were currently using at least one method of non-surgical contraception. The most popular method of contraception remains the contraceptive pill: a quarter (25 per cent) of women reported that they were currently using this method. The second most popular method was the male condom, used by 22 per cent of women aged 16-49. Use of both the contraceptive pill and the male condom was highest among younger women and fell with age.

A quarter (25 per cent) of all women were currently not using a method of contraception, the majority of whom were not currently in a heterosexual relationship. Women aged under 25 were most likely not to be in a heterosexual relationship (43 per cent of women aged 16-17, 20 per cent of women aged 18-19 and 18 per cent of those aged 20-24).

Emergency contraception

Seven per cent of women aged 16-49 had used the 'morning after pill' at least once during the last year: six per cent of women used the 'morning after pill' once during that period, one per cent used it twice and fewer than one per cent used it more than twice. The emergency IUD was used by fewer than one per cent of women in the year prior to interview.

Only two per cent of women not currently using contraception reported using the morning after pill compared with seven per cent of women currently using contraception.

Sterilisation and vasectomies

Around a tenth (11 per cent) of women aged 16-49 and just under two-tenths (17 per cent) of men aged 16-69 are sterilised. The likelihood of a man or woman having been sterilised rose with age.

The majority of men and women reported having had their sterilisation operations carried out by the NHS, although men were more likely than women to have had their operation done outside the NHS (28 per cent compared with 4 per cent).

Sexual behaviour

More than nine in ten (94 per cent) men aged 16-69 only had sex with women, one per cent only had sex with men. Four per cent of men aged 16-69 had not yet had a sexual relationship. Men aged under 20 were those most likely to not yet have had a sexual relationship.

Around three-quarters of men aged 16-69 (74 per cent) and four-fifths of women aged 16-49 (80 per cent) had only one sexual partner during the year prior to interview. Nine per cent of men and seven per cent of women had two or three sexual partners and a further four per cent of men and two per cent of women had four or more sexual partners in the last year. As may be expected, percentages differ markedly by age and by marital status.

Condom use

Two-fifths of men (40 per cent) and just under half of women (47 per cent) aged 16-49 who were either currently in a sexual relationship or had been in the last year used a condom in the year prior to their interview. Respondents who used a condom were most likely to be in the younger age groups and to have had more than one sexual partner in the last year.

Knowledge of sexually transmitted infections

Around two-thirds of men aged 16-69 (67 per cent) and women aged 16-49 (63 per cent) said that their behaviour had not been influenced by what they had heard about HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

However, 25 per cent of men aged 16-69 and 27 per cent of women aged 16-49 said that what they had heard about HIV, AIDS and STIs had influenced them to use a condom more often.

Seven per cent of men and six per cent of women said they were having fewer one night stands, and four per cent of men and eight per cent of women said that they now have a test for STIs when they change partners.

The proportion of men aged 16-69 and women aged 16-49 who were able to identify chlamydia as a sexually transmitted infection, from a list of diseases and infections, has risen steadily since the question was first asked within the 2000/01 survey, from 35 per cent of men aged 16-69 and 65 per cent of women aged 16-49 in 2000/01 to 76 per cent and 91 per cent respectively in 2004/05.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The Omnibus Survey is a multi-purpose survey carried out by the ONS each month on behalf of a range of government departments and other public and non-profit making bodies.
2. Differences cited in the text are statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval.
3. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office
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