

29 September 2004

Coverage
Great Britain
Theme
Health and Care

Wider access to the 'morning after pill'

Since 2001, the proportion of women obtaining emergency contraception from additional sources such as chemists, pharmacies, walk-in centres and minor injuries units has risen, 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 these sources increased from 21 per cent in 2001/02 to 38 per cent in 2003/04. Over the same period, the proportion of women experiencing problems obtaining the 'morning after pill' fell from 13 per cent to four per cent.

The most popular source for obtaining the 'morning after pill' remains the woman's own GP or practice nurse (41 per cent) followed by a chemist or pharmacy (27 per cent) and family planning clinic (21 per cent). The proportion of women obtaining the 'morning after pill' from a walk-in centre or minor injuries unit increased between 2002/03 and 2003/04 from less than one per cent to 11 per cent. Women aged under 30 are five times more likely than those aged 30 and over to obtain the 'morning after pill' from this source (15 per cent compared with three per cent).

Condom failure is mentioned by half (49 per cent) of women who used the 'morning after pill' during the last year as the reason for having used it.

This report presents the results of a survey for the Department of Health carried out in 2003/04 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.

***Contraception and sexual health, 2003**
Series OS no.25. ISBN 1 85774 586 8

Available free on the National Statistics website:
www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=6988

Issued by
National Statistics
1 Drummond Gate
London SW1V 2QQ

Telephone
Press Office 020 7533 5702
Email press.office@ons.gov.uk
Public Enquiries 0845 601 3034

Contact
Sandra Short 020 7533 5933
Email sandra.short@ons.gov.uk

Internet
www.statistics.gov.uk/releases

Reports have also been published with the results of six previous surveys conducted in 1997/98, 1998/99, 1999/2000, 2000/01, 2001/02 and 2002/03. This report includes an examination of any significant changes in the data between 2002/03 and 2003/04. 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

Half (52 per cent) of all women aged 16-49 are 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 are currently using this method. The second most popular method is the male condom, used by 23 per cent of women aged 16-49.

Use of both the contraceptive pill and the male condom is highest among younger women and falls with age.

- Women aged 18-29 are those most likely to be using the contraceptive pill.
- Use of the contraceptive pill falls sharply from the age of 30.
- At least one third of women in the age groups 16-17, 18-19 and 20-24 are using the male condom.
- Use of the male condom begins to fall from age 25 onwards.
- Women under the age of 35 are more likely to use the contraceptive pill than the male condom, this pattern is reversed among women aged 35 and over.

A quarter (25 per cent) of all women are currently not using a method of contraception, the majority of whom are not currently in a heterosexual relationship. Women aged under 20 are those most likely not to be in a heterosexual relationship (45 per cent of women aged 16-17 and 25 per cent of those aged 18-19).

Emergency contraception

One twentieth (six per cent) of women aged 16-49 used the 'morning after pill' at least once during the last year: four 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 three per cent of women not currently using contraception reported using the 'morning after pill' compared with seven per cent of women currently using contraception. Women currently using contraception accounted for seven-eighths of women who had used the 'morning after pill' at least once in the last year.

Sterilisation and vasectomies

One in ten (11 per cent) women aged 16-49 and 17 per cent of men aged 16-69 are sterilised. The likelihood of a man or woman having been sterilised rose with age.

The proportions of men and women aged 16-49 who are sterile were very similar. However, men in their forties are more likely than women of the same age to have had an operation to become sterile, while a larger proportion of women, than men, in this age group are sterile as a result of another operation.

Sexual behaviour

More than nine in ten (92 per cent) men aged 16-69 only had sex with women, two per cent only had sex with men. A twentieth (five 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 women aged 16-49 (78 per cent) had only one sexual partner during the year prior to interview. Eight 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 one 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

Half of men and women aged 16-49 who are either currently in a sexual relationship or have been in the last year used a condom in the year prior to their interview (52 per cent and 50 per cent respectively).

Respondents who use a condom were:

- Most likely to be in the younger age groups. Use of condoms falls with age.
- Most likely to have more than one sexual partner in the last year.
- Most likely to say that they had use a condom to prevent pregnancy.

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).

Almost three in ten men aged 16-69 (27 per cent) and women aged 16-49 (29 per cent) said that what they had heard about HIV, AIDS and STIs had influenced them to use a condom more often. Six per cent of both men and women now have fewer one night stands, and three per cent of men and seven 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 67 per cent and 87 per cent respectively in 2003/04.

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. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
3. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2004.