What is Emergency Contraception (EC)?
Emergency contraception is available to use in case of contraceptive failure (condom tearing or slipping off, missed dosages of oral contraceptive pills), sexual assault, or failure to use contraception.

Options and Access
Copper Intrauterine Device (Paraguard IUD)
- When inserted within 5 days after unprotected sex, the copper IUD is the most effective method of contraception (99% effective).
- For those weighing 165 lbs or more, the copper IUD is considered the preferred EC method for best effectiveness.
- IUD placement does require a visit to a gynecologic provider for insertion, sometimes a practical challenge within the short time frame required for maximum effectiveness as EC.
- Discuss this IUD option with your Health Service provider.

Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECPs)
Levonorgestrel is a single dose pill form of EC available without a prescription at pharmacies, including Brown Pharmacy at Health Services.
- Anyone can buy Levonorgestrel products at pharmacies in Rhode Island. For inventory control, they are sometimes kept ‘behind the counter’ and you need to ask the pharmacist for it when purchasing.
- Levonorgestrel formulations are most effective when taken up to 72 hrs after contraceptive failure or unprotected sex, but there is evidence of some effectiveness up to 120 hours after. Best practice is “the sooner the better.” Effectiveness in preventing pregnancy is wide ranging, between 59-94%.
- Those who weighing 165 lbs or over may potentially have reduced or absent efficacy with use of Levonorgestrel ECPs.

Ulipristal (Ella) is a single dose pill form of EC available only by prescription, including though providers at Health Services.
- It is highly effective (98-99%) up to 120 hrs after unprotected sex.
- You can call Health Services for an appointment with a provider, if you are considering Ulipristal.
- Ability to see a provider within a short time frame for a prescription for Ulipristal may play into decisions about choosing this method over Levonorgestrel over-the-counter products.

NOTE: Even for those weighing 165 lbs or more, if over the counter Levonorgestrel is the only product you have access to in the time frame for using EC, the benefit of using it outweighs any risks.

Side Effects of ECPs
- Both Ulipristal and Levonorgestrel are generally well tolerated.
- Side effects are not common, but nausea, abdominal pain, fatigue, mild headache, dizziness, diarrhea, and vomiting have been reported.
- In the unlikely event that vomiting occurs within one hour of taking ECP, you may need to take additional pills to make up for those lost to vomiting.
- If you are concerned about side effects, call Health Services to discuss.

After You Take ECP
- Your next menstrual period should begin sometime within 2 to 3 weeks after taking ECPs.
- It may be earlier or later than usual and the flow may be heavier, lighter, or more spotty than usual.
- If your period doesn’t start within 3 weeks, see your medical provider to rule out pregnancy.
- ECPs are intended specifically for emergency use and are overall less effective than consistent use of other contraceptive methods.
- After you have taken ECPs, get started on an ongoing method of birth control.
- In addition, consider being evaluated for sexually transmitted infection, as unprotected sex may put you at risk.

Special considerations
- ECPs do not prevent ectopic or tubal pregnancies.
- ECPs do not prevent sexually transmitted diseases.