

British women offered free contraception pill at Christmas

December 6 2011

British women are being offered free supplies of the emergency "morning-after" contraceptive pill over the Christmas and New Year holidays, the country's leading abortion agency said Tuesday.

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) said it saw more women with [unplanned pregnancies](#) in January than any other time, and hoped the project would reduce numbers.

In its online campaign, BPAS references increased festivity at this time of year as one cause, but also warns that pharmacy closures due to the holidays often made it harder to get hold of [emergency contraception](#).

The new service allows women to request the morning-after pill in advance and, following a 15-minute telephone consultation with a nurse, receive a pack that also includes [condoms](#) and "advice literature".

"We know women often do not take the morning-after pill after [unprotected sex](#)," said Ann Furedi, chief executive of BPAS.

"They may not think their risk of pregnancy is high and the cost (about £25, 29 euros, \$39), inconvenience or embarrassment of obtaining it may put them off.

"We hope being able to access it in advance over the phone for free will encourage more women to have one at home, just in case."

The morning-after pill can be taken up to 72 hours after a woman has had sex, although it is most effective if taken within 12 hours.

The anti-abortion charity Life condemned the service, saying it encouraged risky sexual behaviour.

"If a woman has the morning-after pill at home 'just in case' she may be more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour than she would normally -- particularly over the festive period with the associated increase in alcohol consumption," a spokeswoman said.

Department of Health figures show 189,574 abortions were carried out in England and Wales in 2010, 0.3 percent more than in 2009 and eight percent more than in 2000. Some 91 percent were carried out at under 13 weeks.

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