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AIFA ABOLISHES MEDICAL PRESCRIPTION FOR EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION UP TO FIVE DAYS AFTER UNPROTECTED SEXUAL INTERCOURSE FOR MINORS

As established by the Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA) decision no. 998 dated 8 October 2020, medical prescription will no longer be required to dispense Ulipistral acetate (EllaOne), the medicine used for emergency contraception up to five days after sexual intercourse.

AIFA's Director General, Nicola Magrini, commented that this is highly effective for emergency contraception for young women who have had unprotected sex, when taken up to five days after the intercourse. It is also an ethical tool that helps facing those critical circumstances that entail difficult decisions to be made by girls only. However, this is emergency contraception and therefore should not be used as a regular method of contraception.

When purchased at a local pharmacy or drug store, the medicine is accompanied by an information handout that aims to promote informed and effective contraception and avoid inappropriate use of emergency contraception methods.

In light of this, AIFA will soon develop an ad hoc web page, with detailed information on contraception. Contraception, of which the contraceptive pill is a possible option, allows all women to plan a pregnancy and, more generally, their own life.

AIFA's Director General concluded that EllaOne has been in the essential medicine list of the World Health Organisation for this indication since 2017, as part of the access program to contraceptive medicinal products. He also added that adolescent pregnancies are an important indicator of the development of a society, which must be kept at the lowest possible levels.

This is a turning point in the protection of the physical and psychological health of adolescents. Most adolescent pregnancies are not planned and many end in abortion. The birth event in adolescents is often accompanied by risk situations, linked both to the difficulty of young mothers to access maternal/infant services, and to a number of major interpersonal and psychological issues. Adolescent mothers are not only less likely to complete their studies and consequently have a lower chance of employment, but they are also at greater risk of raising their children alone and in poverty.

Adolescent pregnancy is also associated with a higher risk of perinatal morbidity/mortality. As highlighted in the June 2020 Report of the Italian Minister of Health to the Parliament, according to 2018 data, the increase in the use of emergency contraception – levonorgestrel (Norlevo), the “morning after pill”, and ulipistral acetate (EllaOne), the “5 days after pill” – has had a positive impact on the reduction of voluntary pregnancy interruptions, which has been in continuous and progressive decrease since 1983.

Abolishing the medical prescription requirement for emergency contraception for minors is therefore intended to help achieve the ambitious goal of reducing the rate of adolescent conceptions, thus improving the sexual health of adolescents and, more generally, public health.