

Over-the-Counter Emergency Contraception is Available in Manchester

Women in Manchester, England were able to obtain emergency contraception without a prescription under a government-sponsored pilot programme aiming to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies. The three-month scheme was run by the Manchester, Trafford and Salford Health Action Zone, beginning 24 December last year. Until then, the morning-after pill had only been available by prescription from a General Practitioner (GP) or from a family planning centre. The trial had the backing of the Department of Health, and was to run until the end of March.

A spokesperson for the Health Action Zone told the news agency PA News in January: "Sixteen pharmacies are taking part in the pilot across the area, which has some of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in the country. The pharmacists are supplying the drug, not prescribing it. They have all undergone a very rigorous training. They are taught to ask a series of detailed and complex questions that a woman must answer satisfactorily. If not, she will be refused the drug and advised to contact her GP. Those to whom the drug is given must take it on the premises." He said the 10-minute consultation is carried out in a private area of the pharmacy.

The current emergency contraceptive drug is said to prevent 75 percent of pregnan-

cies if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sexual intercourse.

The pilot scheme was to be evaluated before a decision was made on whether to extend it.

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Women Urged to take Cervical Cancer Tests

About 150 women die needlessly every year in Hong Kong from cervical cancer, the Hong Kong Cancer Fund said yesterday, launching a campaign to encourage women to take smear tests.

More than two-thirds of women in Hong Kong have never had a pap smear test and many who do have tests do not have them regularly enough.

Cervical cancer was the fourth most common form of cancer in Hong Kong after cancer of the breast, lung and colon, with 500 new cases each year, yet Hong Kong women knew little about the disease, the group said. It urged women to visit its Web site at <http://www.cancer-fund.org> for information.

"Every year 150 women in Hong Kong die needlessly from cervical cancer, yet unlike other cancers, this one is preventable," said fund chairwoman Sally Lo. "A five-minute pap smear test can prevent a woman from getting cervical cancer because the test can detect the change in the cervix cells before the cancer starts."