



# REPRODUCTIVE EQUITY NOW

## What is a standing order?

A **standing order** is a document issued by a physician or prescriber that authorizes certain parties to dispense medication under certain conditions.

Examples of standing orders from everyday life:

- A standing order authorizes pharmacists to give flu vaccines without needing a prescription from each individual patient's doctor;
- The widespread roll out of the COVID-19 vaccination was made possible thanks to a standing order.
- Massachusetts' 2018 standing order for naloxone, commonly known as NARCAN, allows pharmacists to dispense the opioid antagonist without a prescription to any person at risk of experiencing an opioid-related overdose, and to family members, friends, or others in a position to help someone struggling with substance use disorder.

## What does an emergency contraception standing order do?

The 2017 contraceptive ACCESS law required insurance companies to cover emergency contraception that is purchased with a prescription or purchased pursuant to a standing order.<sup>1</sup> *An Act expanding protections for reproductive and gender-affirming care* instructed the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to develop a statewide standing order for emergency contraception. This means that pharmacists, after consulting with a patient, can dispense either ella or Plan B to them without a prescription from the patient's provider. Pharmacists dispensing pursuant to the state-wide standing order are exempt from civil or criminal liability except in instances of gross negligence or willful misconduct.

## The statewide standing order expands access to emergency contraception by:

1. **Eliminating cost as a barrier:** Many people purchase Plan B One Step over-the-counter and pay for it out of pocket, even though they could have it covered at no cost by their insurance if they went to the process of first getting a prescription from their provider. The standing order allows individuals to access EC from their pharmacist and utilize insurance at the point of sale, without a prescription.
2. **Making it easier for individuals to get the EC that's most effective for them:** Because Plan B One Step is approved for over-the-counter sale, many people purchase it even though it may not be the most effective emergency contraception for them. The standing order allows individuals to access all types of emergency contraception pills at no cost to them, without having to get a prescription.

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<sup>1</sup> [Chapter 120 of the Acts of 2017.](#)