

# Breakthrough Bleeding

Breakthrough bleeding is usually not a concern and can be managed at home. Here's what you need to watch for and how to try to prevent it.

## What is breakthrough bleeding?

Breakthrough bleeding is a name for light menstrual bleeding, or spotting, between menstrual periods, which can happen when you are taking birth control pills.

## What causes breakthrough bleeding and what can I do?

Here are some common things that cause normal breakthrough bleeding and what you can do:

- **Missing 1 or more pills:** Read our handout "What If I Miss a Pill?" [seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1466.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1466.pdf) for information on what to do.
- **Starting a new medicine or a change in the dose of a medicine:** Some medicines can interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Contact the nurse line. We may need to discuss switching your birth control pill or method.
- **Taking your birth control pill at a different time each day:** Try taking your birth control pill at the exact same time every day. Some people will set alarms on their cell phone or computers, or put the pills next to something they use every day, like a toothbrush.
- **Vaginal and cervical infection:** Breakthrough bleeding can be associated with vaginal and cervical infections. It may be helpful for you to have an office visit with us to check for this.
- **Starting a new birth control:** Breakthrough bleeding is very common in the first 3 months of starting a new kind of birth control. If it lasts longer than that, you should make an appointment to discuss whether a different dose or a different type of birth control would be better.

## When is breakthrough bleeding a more serious issue?

If you have heavy breakthrough bleeding **and** any of the following issues that can lead to large loss of blood, call the nurse line Monday through Friday. If it is after hours or a weekend, call your primary care provider or go to Urgent Care:

- Menstrual bleeding that required a trip to the emergency room
- A blood transfusion within the last 3 months
- A bleeding disorder like hemophilia or thalassemia
- Dizziness or severe fatigue
- Loss of consciousness
- Completely soaking one super pad or tampon in less than an hour, or
- Passing multiple menstrual clots bigger than a quarter since breakthrough bleeding started

## Seek urgent medical care if you have:

### To learn more, or for problems, call

- The nurse line  
206-987-2028, option 4
- Your child's healthcare provider

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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