



Affordable Preventive Health Care for Women

Improving Women's Health and Families' Economic Well-Being

The new health care reform law is making health care more affordable for women and our families care by requiring insurance companies to cover preventive health services without additional charges, like co-pays and deductibles. In the fall of 2010, all new health plans began covering mammograms, screenings for cervical cancer and sexually transmitted infections and other important preventive health services at no additional cost to policyholders. Starting no later than August 2012, the same requirement will be expanded to include more women's health services, including contraception.

The services to be added were identified by a committee of medical experts at the Institute of Medicine (IOM). The IOM committee conducted a review of the scientific and public health evidence and recommended a list of additional preventive services necessary to close critical gaps in preventive health coverage for women. **On August 1, 2011, Secretary Sebelius announced new guidelines that will require insurance coverage without co-pays for all of the additional preventive services for women recommended by the IOM.**

These new women's health services include contraception which the experts noted is essential to a woman's ability to plan and time pregnancies, protect her own health and have healthy babies. The IOM experts also recognized, however, that women's health is about more than reproduction, and their recommendations span a wide spectrum of important women's health concerns.

New women's preventive health services to be covered without co-pays

Comprehensive contraceptive care. The full range of Food and Drug Administration approved contraceptive methods, including birth control pills, condoms and IUDs as well as sterilization procedures, patient education and counseling for all women with reproductive capacity.

Screening and counseling for intimate partner violence. Screening and counseling for women and adolescents about current and past violence and abuse so that providers can address health concerns about safety and other health problems that may be associated with interpersonal and domestic violence.

Screening for gestational diabetes. Screening pregnant women for gestational diabetes, a form of the disease which develops during pregnancy and increases a woman's risk of developing other forms in the future as well as her child's risk of being overweight and insulin resistant. Gestational diabetes occurs more often among women of color.

Breastfeeding counseling and equipment. Making trained breastfeeding counselors available to all women during pregnancy and after they give birth and making breastfeeding equipment available to those who want it.

Screening for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Counseling all sexually active women on STIs annually; screening all sexually active women for HIV infection annually; and adding a test for high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) – an infection that can cause cervical cancer -- to conventional cervical cancer screening for women starting at age 30 and continuing every three years. These recommendations for counseling and screening are critical at time when more and more women are becoming infected by risk behaviors of their partners that the women may not know about.

Well-woman preventive care visits. Conducting at least one well-woman preventive care visit for adult women each year so that women can get the recommended preventive services.

Adding these preventive services to the list of women’s health care that the health reform law already requires insurance companies to cover without extra co-pays and other charges will create **a powerful tool for improving the health of all women.**

Take Action Today: [Thank HHS Secretary Sebelius](#) for her leadership in making women’s preventive health services affordable so that women will have access to the care they need to stay healthy, including contraception, breast feeding support and screening for domestic violence and HIV.
<http://www.raisingwomensvoices.net/contracct-is-preventn-thankyou>

**CONTRACEPTION
IS PREVENTION!**
THANK SECRETARY SEBELIUS HERE.

Share the news about this historic step forward for women’s health!

In addition to thanking Secretary Sebelius, you can help spread the word about this historic advance for women’s health and make sure your friends and neighbors have the facts about the HHS decision. Raise the topic at community meetings and educational forums on health reform and other places where women’s health is being discussed. Join the conversation in your local and state media by signing on to chat rooms on their websites, sending letters to the editor and calling in to local talk radio shows. And get the word out using social media too – if you friend us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter, you can easily pass along Raising Women’s Voices messages to your own networks.

Here are key points to make:

- **Covering contraception without co-pays is a popular policy.** According to a recent [Thomson Reuters-NPR](#) poll, 77 percent of Americans believe that private medical insurance should provide no-cost birth control and 74 percent believe that government-sponsored plans should do the same.
- **Adopting the IOM recommendations will improve women’s health.** Women have unique health care needs especially during the reproductive years. The new HHS guidelines acknowledge these unique needs and treat women’s health with respect.
- **Covering family planning is cost-effective and will likely save insurance plans money.** According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, there was no increase in costs at all after Congress required coverage of contraceptives for federal employees in 1998. And a 2000 study by the National Business Group on Health estimated that it costs employers 15–17 percent more to *not* provide contraceptive coverage in employee health plans than to provide such coverage.
- **HHS has made an historic decision that will benefit women for generations to come.** The HHS guidelines will be good for women's health and pocketbooks. This decision will give women, their daughters and granddaughters access to the care they need to be healthy at all stages of their lives. It will also ease the budget pressures on families who are struggling in these tough economic times.