

Young Women's Access

While gaining information about and access to contraceptive drugs and devices can be difficult for all women, young women in particular face unique challenges in these pursuits. Lack of accurate information, financial limitations, unreasonable age restrictions, and parental notification and/or consent laws are just some of the barriers that prevent young women from accessing the full range of contraceptive options.

Young people need access to contraceptives.

Forty-six percent of all 15- to 19-year-olds in the United States have had sex at least once.¹ Sexually active teens who are not using contraceptives have a 90 percent chance of becoming pregnant within a year.² Furthermore, the teen pregnancy rate in the United States is significantly higher than that of many other developed countries.³ The high US rates are primarily due to less contraceptive use by sexually active teenagers.⁴

Young people need comprehensive sexuality education.

Comprehensive sexuality education programs teach that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, these programs also provide medically accurate, comprehensive information about the health benefits and side effects of all contraceptives and barrier methods as they relate to both pregnancy prevention and risk reduction for STIs, including HIV/AIDS. These programs have demonstrated effectiveness in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing contraception and condom use.⁵

Do young people need parental notification and/or consent for contraceptive services?

Only two states currently require parental consent for contraceptive services in state-funded family planning programs. However, 1 in 5 teens whose parents do not

know they obtain contraceptive services would continue to have sex—but without contraceptives—if the law required that their parents be notified of their visit.⁶

Women under the age of 18 cannot obtain Plan B emergency contraception over the counter.

In 2006 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the drug for over-the-counter sale, but restricted those sales to individuals 18 and older. This decision was made despite overwhelming scientific evidence indicating that Plan B emergency contraception is safe for women of all ages.

Young people face significant financial barriers to access.

Most young people receive health insurance through their parents. As such, those teens wishing to obtain contraceptives without their parents' knowledge must pay out of pocket.

¹Facts on American Teens' Sexual and Reproductive Health, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2006.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Darroch, J et al., *Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior in Developed Countries: Can More Progress Be Made?*, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2001.

⁵Fact Sheet: *The Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act*, Washington, DC: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US, 2007.

⁶Ibid.