

Nationally representative survey on women's opinions about over-the-counter access to oral contraceptives

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Executive Summary

Recent studies have indicated that it is both safe and effective for women to obtain and use the birth control pill without obtaining a prescription from a doctor or nurse first. But little recent research has explored what women think about this, as well as whether women would use a pill that is available over the counter. We performed a nationally representative survey of adult women that are at risk of having an unintended pregnancy. We surveyed women who were between the age of 18 and 44, were not pregnant or trying to get pregnant, were sexually active and were not sterilized. We performed the survey in collaboration with Knowledge Networks using an online panel of people that are considered representative of the US population.

We found that 62% of women who participated in the survey were in favor of birth control pills being available over the counter. In addition, 37% said they were likely to use an over-the-counter birth control pill if one were available. This included 59% of women who were currently using birth control pills, as well as 30% of women using no birth control method or a method that is less effective than the pill. Controlling for other factors, younger women; divorced/separated women or those living with a partner but not married; uninsured women and those with private insurance; women living in the south; and current users of the birth control pill or a less effective method, as well as women who were not using any form of birth control, were significantly more likely to say they were likely to use an over-the-counter pill. 70% said over-the-counter access would be more convenient, 51% thought it would prevent unintended pregnancy, 23% said it would be more private; 62% thought women might use the wrong pill or might not get Pap smears, 49% worried that insurance would not cover over-the-counter pills, and 47% thought teens might have sex earlier or more often. On average, women were willing to spend \$20 per month for an over-the-counter pill.

Overall, we found that US women are strongly supportive of over-the-counter access to the birth control pill, and many would obtain refills or start using the pill if it were available over the counter. Women's concerns need to be addressed as efforts move forward for an over-the-counter switch for the birth control pill.