



## Contraception: Trends in Use, Safety and Effectiveness

### Women of Reproductive Age (15-44)

- In 1990, there were 58 million U.S. women aged 15-44.
- 30 million are married (52%), 21 million have not yet married (36%) and 7 million (12%) are formerly married (widowed, divorced or separated).
- 74% are non-Hispanic whites, 13% are non-Hispanic blacks, 9% are Hispanic and 4% are of other racial or ethnic groups.
- 14% have incomes under 150% of the federal poverty level (in 1990, income of \$19,011 for a family of 4).
- Over          are at risk of unintended pregnancy: They are sexually active and do not want to become pregnant but could if they used no contraceptive method.
- 30% are aged 15-24, 37% are aged 25-34 and 33% are aged 35-44.

### Sexual Activity

- 89% of women aged 15-44 have had intercourse at least once. Most of these 52 million women are currently sexually active; on average, they have intercourse 70 times a year.
- $\frac{3}{4}$  of women have had intercourse by age 20.
- 7 in 10 of the 21 million women who have not yet married have had intercourse.
- 6 in 10 women aged 15-19 and 7 in 10 aged 20-34 have had two or more sexual partners since becoming sexually active.

### Contraceptive Use and Sterilization

- 9 in 10 women at risk of unintended pregnancy use a contraceptive method; 1 in 10 use no method.
- 6 in 10 women aged 15-44 (35 million women) either use a reversible contraceptive method, have been sterilized or have partners who have been sterilized.
- Among those practicing contraception, 20 million women (58%) use reversible contraceptives.
- Sterilization is the most popular method of birth control, relied upon by 14 million women, or 42% of method users. More than 10 million women have undergone contraceptive sterilization, and another 4 million rely on their partner's vasectomy to avoid unintended pregnancy.
- Of the 8.5 million women aged 15-19, 2.7 million, or 32%, use a contraceptive method; of these, 52% take oral contraceptives, 44% use condoms and 4% rely on other methods.
- Female sterilization is more commonly relied upon by women aged 30-44, by previously married women, by black and Hispanic women, and by the least educated and lowest-income women than by other women.
- Currently married women and white women are more likely to rely upon their sexual partner's vasectomy for contraception.
- Condoms are used primarily by the sexual partners of teenagers and unmarried women.
- The diaphragm is used most often by women over 30, and by white, college-educated and married women.
- The IUD is used most often by women over 35 and by previously married women.

<b>Method</b>	<b># of users (in thousands)</b>	<b>% of users</b>
Sterilization	14,531	42.1
Tubal	(10,182)	(29.5)
Vasectomy	(4,349)	(12.6)
Pill	9,837	28.5
Condom	6,110	17.7
Other methods	1,657	4.8
Diaphragm	966	2.8
Periodic abstinence	932	2.7
IUD	483	1.4
<b>Total Users</b>	<b>34,516</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Oral Contraceptive Use

- 29% of all women currently using contraception rely on the Pill- about 10 million women.
- Oral contraceptives are used most often by women under 25, by unmarried women and by those who intend to have children.
- About half (52%) of teenage women using contraception take the Pill-nearly 3 million women.
- 8 out of 10 sexually experienced U.S. women have used oral contraceptives at some point in their lives-more than 40 million women.

## Trends in Contraceptive Use 1982-1990

- Female sterilization use increased from 23% to 30%.
- Overall condom use increased somewhat, from 12% to 18%; use increased sharply among teenagers (from 21% to 44%) and among unmarried women (from 12% to 30%).
- Diaphragm use declined from 8% to 3%; use declined sharply among unmarried women and women under age 30.
- The proportion of IUD users declined overall, from 7% to 1%. Declines were especially sharp among women under 35, unmarried women, less educated women and

Hispanic women.

## Contraceptive Safety

- Contraceptives pose few serious risks to a user's health. The riskiest contraceptive choice a sexually active woman can make is to use no method at all. Consistent and correct use of a contraceptive method not only prevents unintended pregnancy but helps a woman to preserve her ability to have children in the future and to safeguard her health.
- The health dangers associated with an unplanned pregnancy far exceed safety considerations attendant to contraceptive methods. Although pregnancy and childbirth are relatively safe, they account for 1%-2% of all deaths each year among women of childbearing age.
- Some contraceptive methods save lives by preventing reproductive cancers, and some preserve women's ability to have children in the future by protecting them against STDs and pelvic infections.
- Two-thirds of all women have more than one sexual partner during their lives. With each new sexual partner a woman is exposed to the risk of contracting an STD. Each year, about 1% of sexually active women develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) usually as a result of an STD, which can lead to infertility. Women who use barrier and spermicide methods or the Pill are half as likely to get PID as women who use no contraceptive method.

## Contraceptive Effectiveness

- The effectiveness of short-term contraceptive methods varies more by age, marital and poverty status than by method, suggesting that unintended pregnancy often results from improper and irregular use rather than from a method's inherent limitations.
- Next to sterilization, contraceptive implants (NORPLANT®) and the injectable contraceptive Depo-Provera are the most effective contraceptive methods-fewer than 1% of users become pregnant in the first year of use.

## Contraceptive Failure Rates\*

Method	Perfect use	Average use
No method (chance)	85.0	85.0
Spermicides	3.0	30.0
Sponge	8.0	24.0
Withdrawal	4.0	24.0
Periodic abstinence	9.0	19.0
Cervical cap	6.0	18.0
Diaphragm	6.0	18.0
Condom	2.0	16.0
Pill	0.1	6.0
IUD	0.8	4.0
Tubal sterilization	0.2	0.5
Depo-Provera	0.3	0.4
Vasectomy	0.1	0.2
NORPLANT <sup>®</sup>	0.04	0.05

\*Estimated percentage of women experiencing an unintended pregnancy in the first year of use. Perfect-use rates are given for the most commonly used type of contraceptive method (e.g., the calendar method of periodic abstinence, the copper IUD, and combined oral contraceptives).

## Pregnancies

- Each year, 1 in 9 women aged 15-44 become pregnant.
- Of the 6.4 million pregnancies in 1988, 3.6 million (56%) were unplanned.
- Of the unplanned pregnancies, 43% ended in birth, 44% in abortion and an estimated 13% in miscarriage.
- 8 in 10 pregnancies to women under age 20 are unplanned, compared with 6 in 10 to those aged 20-24, 5 in 10 to those aged 25-29, 4 in 10 to those aged 30-34, 6 in 10 to those aged 35-39 and 8 in 10 to women aged 40 and older.
- 47% of unplanned pregnancies (1.7 million) occur to women who were using contraception, mainly because

of inconsistent and incorrect use.

- Women who were not using contraception account for over half of all unplanned pregnancies (1.9 million).

## Births

- Each year, 7% of women aged 15-44 give birth; in 1993, there were 4 million births.
- Birthrates are highest among women aged 20-29, married women and minority women.
- On average, women today have 2 children.
- Birthrates for women aged 30-44 were higher in 1993 than they had been since the early 1970s.
- Despite the trend toward later childbearing, birthrates for women aged 15-17 in 1993 (37.8 per 1,000) were 24% higher than in 1986 (30.5 per 1,000).
- 31% of births in 1993 were to unmarried women.
- 40% of all births are the result of unplanned pregnancies; half of all births to women under 200% of the federal poverty level are unplanned.

## Abortions

- In 1992, there were 1.5 million abortions; 3% of women aged 15-44 had an abortion.
- 47% of today's women will have had an abortion by age 45.
- The number of abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44 declined 10% between 1980 and 1992 (from 29 to 26).
- Abortion rates are highest among women under age 30, unmarried women, poor women and minority women.
- On average, women report that more than 3 reasons led them to choose an abortion.
- 5 in 10 women having abortions were using a contraceptive method in the month during which they conceived.

---

### Sources of Data:

The data in this fact sheet are from research conducted by The Alan Guttmacher Institute and from the National Center for Health Statistics and/or were published in Family Planning Perspectives. Data are from

the latest year for which they are available and refer to women aged 15-44 unless otherwise specified; numbers may not add to totals because of rounding.

For More Information:

"Barriers to Contraceptive Services," by Jane Silverman, Aida Torres and Jacqueline Darroch Forrest, *Family Planning Perspectives*, Volume 19, Number 3, May/June 1987.

*Contraceptive Technology*, 16th Revised Edition, Robert A Hatcher, M.D., et al., 1994.

The Kaiser Family Foundation Survey on Public Perceptions about Contraception, January 1996.

"Oral Contraceptives and Reproductive Cancers: Weighing the Risks and Benefits," by Ann L. Coker, Susan Harlap and Judith Fortney, *Family Planning Perspectives*, Volume 25, Number 1, January/February 1993.

*Preventing Pregnancy, Protecting Health: A New Look at Birth Control Choices in the United States*, The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1991.

© 1996 The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1/31/96

This fact sheet was prepared as background material for a briefing held on January 31, 1996, entitled "Perceptions and Realities: How Safe Is the Pill? The Role of the Media, Healthcare Providers, and the Pharmaceutical Industry in Shaping American Women's Perceptions About Birth Control". It was jointly sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the National Press Foundation, and The Alan Guttmacher Institute as part of an ongoing series for journalists on reproductive health topics -- specifically, unplanned pregnancy, teenage pregnancy, contraception, and abortion.