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Dear Working Group member,

We are very excited about the recent publication of an article authored by several working group members in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*. The paper reviews the evidence on potential concerns about adolescent access to OTC OCs and finds no scientific basis for imposing an age restriction on a future OTC OC. The paper was widely covered in the media, including [NPR's All Things Considered](#), [Teen Vogue](#), and the [Washington Post](#), among others.

Also in this newsletter, we touch on a new regulation on pharmacist prescribing of contraceptives in Colorado and highlight articles discussing contraceptive coverage and the Affordable Care Act, including [an analysis](#) by working group member Adam Sonfield of the Guttmacher Institute. As always, please let me know if you have any questions or feedback, or ideas/topics for future newsletters.

Thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'e'.

Kate Grindlay
Project Director/Associate
Ibis Reproductive Health

Adolescent access

An article published this month in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* examines the regulatory process involved in making OCs available OTC for young people, and reviews evidence on the impact birth control pills and OTC access have on the reproductive health and behavior of adolescents. The authors find that evidence supports improving access for young people and that they are capable of using OCs properly to prevent unintended pregnancy. The idea for this article originally arose from a meeting of adolescent health experts convened by the OCs OTC Working Group.

The article describes the criteria used by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to

determine if a drug can safely be available without a doctor's prescription, and recounts the lengthy regulatory battle that ensued to make emergency contraception available OTC without an age restriction. The authors investigate whether or not there is any scientific rationale for the FDA to place an age restriction on a future OTC OC product. Existing research demonstrates that both combined oral contraceptives (COCs) and progestin-only pills (POPs) are effective and safe, and preliminary data suggest that women under the age of 18, like adult women, can successfully assess whether they can safely use oral contraceptives. The review also cites research showing that by age 14, adolescents have the cognitive ability to make informed decisions about taking birth control pills, and that women under 18 are no more likely than women aged 18-24 to miss or skip pills during the first two years of use. The potential for OTC access to lead to increased sexual risk behaviors among adolescents is also explored, and the authors refer to research showing that increasing access to condoms and emergency contraception did not result in an increase in sexual risk behaviors among adolescents. The last concern examined is the potential for OTC access to reduce the opportunities for clinicians to counsel teens on reproductive health issues during preventive care visits. Although the effect of OTC access on these visits is unknown, the authors point to research showing that only 38% of 14-17 year olds had an annual preventive care visit between 2000-2004, and note that adolescents can already access sexual and reproductive health services from places other than a physician's office. Based on existing evidence, the review concludes that there is no scientific basis for imposing an age restriction on a future OTC OC product, and that birth control pills are safe and effective for young people.

Upadhya K, Santelli J, Raine-Bennett T, Kottke M, Grossman D. Over-the-counter access to oral contraceptives for adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2017, article in-press: DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.12.024>.

Baltimore Sun: [Hopkins-led study finds 'the pill' would be safe without prescription](#)
Bustle: [Over-the-counter birth control pills could have huge benefits for teens, experts say](#)
Johns Hopkins University press release: [Experts find strong case for over-the-counter oral contraceptives for adults and teens](#)
NPR: [Over-the-counter birth control pills would be safe for teens, researchers say](#)
Teen Vogue: [Over-the-counter birth control safe for teens, research finds](#)
Washington Post: [It's time we finally offer over-the-counter birth control pills](#)

Pharmacist-prescribed birth control in Colorado

Colorado is the most recent state to expand access to OCs and the patch via pharmacy provision. A [bill](#) allowing collaborative practice agreements between physicians and pharmacists was signed into law in 2016. The ability for pharmacists to prescribe OCs and the patch could go into effect as early as April 2017 and will only be available to those over age 18 and after a consultation from a trained pharmacist.

Denver Post: [Access to birth control widens as Colorado pharmacists prepare to prescribe oral contraceptives](#)

Contraceptive coverage

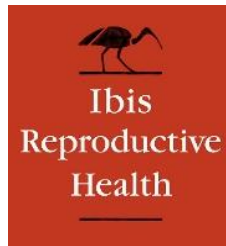
The Guttmacher Institute recently released [a report](#) outlining state strategies to protect the benefits of the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive coverage without cost-sharing, including policies that go beyond the federal standard such as covering OTC contraceptive medicines without a prescription.

Ibis President, Kelly Blanchard, was featured in [this article](#) from Bustle, discussing the benefits of the contraceptive coverage guarantee and broader access to contraceptives.

About us

The Oral Contraceptives (OCs) Over-the-Counter (OTC) Working Group is a coalition of reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations, nonprofit research and advocacy groups, university-based researchers, and prominent clinicians who share a commitment to providing all women of reproductive age easier access to safe, effective, acceptable, and affordable contraceptives. The working group was established in 2004 to explore the potential of over-the-counter access to oral contraceptives to reduce disparities in reproductive health care access and outcomes, and to increase opportunities for women to access a safe, effective method of contraception, free of unnecessary control, as part of a healthy sexual and reproductive life.

The working group is coordinated by Ibis Reproductive Health.



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