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Birth Control Next to the Tylenol?

New Over-the-Counter Access to Contraception Addresses a Health Equity Gap for Millions of Latinas

Latinas, like all women, should have equitable access to contraception to exercise their reproductive rights, maintain their overall health, and make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive lives. Yet Latinas have the least access to contraception of any racial or ethnic group.

Many factors reduce Latina access to birth control, leading to disparities in reproductive health care. Sadly, Latinas experience unintended pregnancy at a higher rate and face twice the rate of teenage pregnancies compared to the national average; more than [half \(53%\) of Latinas in the United States become pregnant at least once before age 20](#). Latinas also have lower contraceptive use compared to non-Hispanic white women: young Hispanic women are [only half as likely to use contraception compared to non-Hispanic white women](#) of the same age. Throughout the Southern and Western United States, where millions of Latinas reside, access to health care coverage is limited by [many states' failure to expand Medicaid](#), and Latinas [are also likely to lack access to health care insurance coverage](#).

Language and cultural barriers can also hinder Latinas' access to birth control. Limited English proficiency may impede communication with health care providers. Latinas are among the 19 million women who are eligible for publicly funded contraception but live in "[contraceptive deserts](#)," defined as counties where there are not enough health centers or health care providers that offer the full range of safe and effective birth control options to meet the needs of the number of eligible women in that county. People living in contraceptive deserts must drive 100 miles to the nearest clinic and may need to factor in transportation and child care costs as a part of the cost of obtaining contraception.

Ready and consistent access to contraception (and health care in general) can play a pivotal role in helping Latinas achieve economic security and the freedom to decide if, how, and when to grow their families. **And there is some good news for Latinas and all women that will provide more ready access to basic birth control in the form of the pill.** After considering the recommendation by an advisory panel, in July 2023 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

[made the decision](#) to allow a commonly taken birth control pill to become available for sale directly to the public and over-the-counter (OTC), meaning it would be sold without the need for a prescription and alongside other commonly available medications such as Tylenol.

“Today’s approval marks the first time a nonprescription daily oral contraceptive will be an available option for millions of people in the United States,” said Patrizia Cavazzoni, M.D., director of the FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. **“When used as directed, daily oral contraception is safe and is expected to be more effective than currently available nonprescription contraceptive methods in preventing unintended pregnancy.”**

The decision by the panel will permit OTC sale of a progestin-only birth control pill called Opill, commonly known as the "mini-pill." The decision will likely increase convenience and accessibility for those seeking a pill-based contraceptive method, benefiting Latinas and other women who face barriers in accessing medical help or obtaining prescriptions. Following its decision, the FDA is planning to consider additional forms of the pill and, based on the evidence, will decide whether to make them available for OTC sale in the future.

Increasing Awareness About the Availability of an Over-the-Counter Birth Control Pill

Given the FDA’s decision, the cultural and linguistic barriers within the Latino community concerning the use of birth control, and the possibility for mis- and disinformation about this issue, it is important for trusted and culturally responsive community-based organizations to spread awareness and educate the community about all of the readily available contraception options when they are providing health information.

For more information and resources on the FDA’s decision, visit [. Materials on the website](#) address questions about the evidence and record of safety for Opill (the specific pill in the decision), describe the common side effects of Opill, provide instructions for its use, and highlight the steps that were part of the FDA’s decision and process. Additional information may be found on [the FDA’s website](#).