

Free the Pill

Ensuring young people's access to future over-the-counter birth control pills

Each of us should have the freedom to make decisions about our own bodies and lives with dignity and respect. Birth control pills are an essential part of the full range of sexual and reproductive health care and are one of the best-studied medicines on the market today. However, in the United States, there are many barriers to getting birth control pills, especially for young people, due to systemic inequities in our health care system. Young people should have the resources they need to plan their futures and take care of their health, including access to the birth control method of their choice, without having to face barriers or stigma. For more equitable access, we need birth control pills that are available over the counter (OTC), accessible to people of all ages, fully covered by insurance, and priced affordably.

A safe, effective, and appropriate option for young people

Decades of research and experience show that birth control pills are safe and effective for over-the-counter use by adults and adolescents, and major medical associations agree. [Studies show](#) that people can easily self-screen to determine if birth control pills are right for them. Furthermore, [we have evidence](#) that contraindications to birth control pills are rarer among adolescents compared to adults. Given the safety, efficacy, and public benefit of birth control pills, the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) and the [American Medical Association](#) support OTC birth control pills for people of all ages and have been involved in a coalition-driven effort to make this option available in the United States.

Young people's unique barriers to access

Young people often face unique barriers when navigating the health care system, which can make accessing birth control pills more difficult, especially when restricted by a prescription requirement. For example, a young person may struggle with taking time away from school to travel to an appointment, with finding or funding transportation to their provider's office, or their on-campus clinic may offer limited hours. Young people also have different privacy needs and experience stigma that can limit their reproductive health choices. Youth are not always able to access birth control pills confidentially if there is a parental consent requirement for a prescription, or if they are on their parent's insurance plan.

Over-the-counter birth control pills that are fully covered by insurance and priced affordably would help eliminate many of these obstacles for young people and give individuals of all ages the ability to control their health, lives, and futures.

[Research shows](#) that 29% of teens would likely use an OTC birth control pill if available, with even greater likelihood if covered by insurance. The same study showed that teens were willing to pay \$10 on average per month out of pocket.

Health care costs and affordability are important concerns for young people, so it is critical that any OTC birth control pill is fully covered by insurance and priced at an affordable retail price to ensure equitable access for people of all ages.

Young people are ready for over-the-counter birth control pills

Everyone should have the option to choose what is best for themselves, and be able to make decisions regarding their own health and lives. Birth control pills offer a range of health benefits—in addition to being highly effective in preventing pregnancy, birth control pills also can help reduce pain and heavy bleeding associated with periods, prevent acne and anemia, and reduce the risk of certain cancers. Whether it is for preventing pregnancy or for one of these other health benefits, many young people want over-the-counter birth control pills so that they can have autonomy over their bodies and the freedom to thrive. In a [recent Teen Vogue poll](#), 76% of young people ages 18-34 said birth control should be freely available with no prescription required. [In another survey](#), 73% of young people ages 14-17 said they supported OTC access to birth control pills, and 61% said they would likely use OTC birth control pills.

Across the country, young people are raising their voices to advocate for expanding access to contraceptive care and making birth control pills available OTC. In partnership with [Advocates for Youth](#) and the [#FreeThePill Youth Council](#), we are working to [center their voices and experiences](#) in the movement to make over-the-counter birth control pills a reality in the United States, and ensure that they are accessible to all.

—

About Free the Pill

Free the Pill, operated by [Ibis Reproductive Health](#), is a campaign to educate and engage in support of over-the-counter (OTC) birth control pills in the United States that are affordable, fully covered by insurance, and available to people of all ages. Campaign activities are driven by a coalition of more than 150 reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations, research and advocacy groups, youth activists, health care providers, prominent medical and health professional associations, and other professionals, who have been working since 2004 to build the evidence in support of OTC birth control pills in the United States.