

News Release

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Affordable Care Act Ensures Women Receive Preventive Services at No Additional Cost

Historic new guidelines that will ensure women receive preventive health services at no additional cost were announced today by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Developed by the independent Institute of Medicine, the new guidelines require new health insurance plans to cover women's preventive services such as well-woman visits, breastfeeding support, domestic violence screening, and contraception without charging a co-payment, co-insurance or a deductible.

"The Affordable Care Act helps stop health problems before they start," said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. "These historic guidelines are based on science and existing literature and will help ensure women get the preventive health benefits they need."

Before health reform, too many Americans didn't get the preventive health care they need to stay healthy, avoid or delay the onset of disease, lead productive lives, and reduce health care costs. Often because of cost, Americans used preventive services at about half the recommended rate.

Last summer, HHS released new insurance market rules under the Affordable Care Act requiring all new private health plans to cover several evidence-based preventive services like mammograms, colonoscopies, blood pressure checks, and childhood immunizations without charging a copayment, deductible or coinsurance. The Affordable Care Act also made recommended preventive services free for people on Medicare.

Today's announcement builds on that progress by making sure women have access to a full range of recommended preventive services without cost sharing, including:

- well-woman visits;
- screening for gestational diabetes;
- human papillomavirus (HPV) DNA testing for women 30 years and older;
- sexually-transmitted infection counseling;
- human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) screening and counseling;
- FDA-approved contraception methods and contraceptive counseling;
- breastfeeding support, supplies, and counseling; and
- domestic violence screening and counseling.

New health plans will need to include these services without cost sharing for insurance policies with plan years beginning on or after August 1, 2012. The rules governing coverage of preventive services which allow plans to use reasonable medical management to help define the nature of the covered service apply to women's preventive services. Plans will retain the flexibility to control costs and promote efficient delivery of care by, for example, continuing to charge cost-sharing for branded drugs if a generic version is available and is just as effective and safe for the patient to use.

The administration also released an amendment to the prevention regulation that allows religious institutions that offer insurance to their employees the choice of whether or not to cover contraception services. This regulation is modeled on the most common accommodation for churches available in the majority of the 28 states that already require insurance companies to cover contraception. HHS welcomes comment on this policy.

Previously, preventive services for women had been recommended one-by-one or as part of guidelines targeted at men as well. As such, the HHS directed the independent Institute of Medicine to, for the first time ever, conduct a scientific review and provide recommendations on specific preventive measures that meet women's unique health needs and help keep women healthy. HHS' Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) used the IOM report issued July 19, when developing the guidelines that are being issued today. The IOM's report relied on independent physicians, nurses, scientists, and other experts to make these determinations based on scientific evidence.

Today's announcement is another part of the Obama Administration's broader effort to address the health and well-being of our communities through initiatives such as the President's Childhood Obesity Task Force, the First Lady's Let's Move! campaign, the National Quality Strategy, and the National Prevention Strategy.

For more information on the HHS guidelines for expanding women's preventive services, please visit: <http://www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets/womensprevention08012011a.html>. The guidelines can be found at: www.hrsa.gov/womensguidelines/.

To learn more about the Affordable Care Act, please visit www.healthcare.gov.