

# US confirms contraception without co-pay rule

January 20 2012

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US health authorities on Friday finalized a change that will force most insurance plans to cover contraception for women and other preventive health services at no extra cost.

A proposed exception for churches and other groups that may have objected on religious grounds was changed to allow one extra year -- or by August 2013 instead of 2012 -- for them to comply with the rule.

"This additional year will allow these organizations more time and flexibility to adapt to this new rule," said Health and Human Services Secretary [Kathleen Sebelius](#).

"This decision was made after very careful consideration, including the important concerns some have raised about religious liberty," she added.

"I believe this proposal strikes the appropriate balance between respecting religious freedom and increasing access to important preventive services."

The final rule, which followed an interim decision announced in August 2011, was applauded by women's rights advocates.

"This is a huge and important victory for women," said Cindy Pearson, head of the National Women's Health Network.

"Women need full and affordable coverage for all our health needs --

including comprehensive contraceptive care -- regardless of where we work."

Among the services to be covered are "FDA-approved contraception methods and contraceptive counseling; breast-feeding support, supplies, and counseling; and domestic violence screening and counseling," HHS said.

Also included are annual office check-ups, screening for [gestational diabetes](#), human papillomavirus (HPV) testing for women 30 and older, sexually transmitted infection counseling and [human immunodeficiency virus](#) (HIV) screening and counseling.

Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, lashed out at the decision, saying it forced some people to act against their beliefs.

The decision by the administration of President [Barack Obama](#) "ordered almost every employer and insurer in the country to provide sterilization and contraceptives, including some abortion-inducing drugs, in their [health](#) plans," he said.

"Never before has the federal government forced individuals and organizations to go out into the marketplace and buy a product that violates their conscience," he added.

"In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences."

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Citation: US confirms contraception without co-pay rule (2012, January 20) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-01-contraception-co-pay.html>

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