Access to Contraceptives Will Help Reduce Health Disparities Among Minority Women

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After supporters reviewed the new preventive care regulation that governs the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a.k.a. health care reform, many agreed that the Obama administration policy will especially benefit women of color, reported the Huffington Post.

The specific preventive care provision to the health care reform bill requires all employer-based and group health care plans to provide free coverage of all Food and Drug Administration-approved contraceptives, including "the pill," which is also used to treat conditions unrelated to pregnancy prevention. (Some organizations with religious connections would be exempt from the regulation.)

While some religious organizations continue to raise a political stink about how the regulation will limit their religious freedom, health experts stress one major benefit of the new rule: It will help to reduce the health disparities that African-American and Latina women face.

On example of a health disparity is that women of color are much more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women. In addition, existing studies show black women are three times as likely as same-age white women to experience an unintended pregnancy, and Latino women are twice as likely as white women to have an unplanned pregnancy.

How is access to contraceptives key to addressing these health disparities? Well, experts say having access to contraceptives helps women plan pregnancies and space more time between children, and that in turn can improve both women's and infants' health. Evidence shows that women who plan pregnancies experience fewer premature or low-weight births and are at less risk for infant or maternal mortality. That means more healthy babies and fewer mothers' deaths.

What's more, the new preventive care policy under health care reform will allow women access to oral contraceptives, condoms and family planning programs without them having to bear costs many can't afford.

Realistically, the regulation won't address everyone's needs, such as the needs of unemployed

women or those not covered by employer-sponsored health insurance plans. But experts say the regulation is a smart step toward universal no-cost contraceptive coverage as well as a way to show women of color that their health matters.

Did you know that pregnancy-related discrimination against women is on the rise in the U.S. workplace? Click here to read more.

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