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Identity

## Why Over the Counter Birth Control Is Crucial for Young People

“I have dozens of college essays to write. I don’t have time for a baby!”

BY **ROSE SCHNABEL** - NOVEMBER 13, 2019

*In this op-ed, Rose Schnabel celebrates **Thanks Birth Control Day** by calling for over the counter birth control access for young people.*

It was a typical summer sleepover. My friend and I were engrossed in a conversation about our upcoming senior year of high school when she mentioned something unexpected: She had started dating a boy and they had decided that they were ready to be intimate. In preparation, my friend had asked her parents about getting a prescription for a birth control pill to prevent unintended pregnancy, but they seemingly interpreted her foresight as a teenage whim and refused to take her to the doctor to get a prescription. Frustrated, she said to me, “I have dozens of college essays to write. I don’t have time for a baby!”

Young people like us already decide if, when, and under what circumstances we want to be sexually active, but we still face challenges in getting a birth control prescription. Whether it’s because our parents don’t want us to, we can’t afford a doctor visit, or anything else, it’s time we are given access to the resources to help us safely and responsibly carry out our decisions. Over the counter birth

control pills could be another step toward empowering young people to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive health. And it's something teens like me want.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, between 2006 and 2010, 82% of women ages 15–19 who were at risk of unintended pregnancy were using a contraceptive method, and 59% were using a highly effective method, such as the pill or another hormonal method. Although many factors contribute to contraceptive use and the decision on which kind to use, there is evidence that over the counter birth control pills may increase the number of young people who use them. Nearly three quarters of teenage respondents to a survey about access to oral contraceptives supported the idea of over the counter access and 61% reported that they would “likely use oral contraceptives available through this approach.”

Giving young people the tools to act responsibly is a key reason for the need for birth control pills over the counter, but it is not the only one. For many young people, provider visits are difficult to schedule due to busy academic and extracurricular schedules, inaccessibility or high cost of transportation, or the cost of an appointment. There is also still a persistent culture of shame and stigma surrounding sexual activity of adolescents. Many teens with whom I spoke to in my high school community had experiences like my friend's — they feared judgement from their family or friends for seeking out and using contraception. All of these factors coalesce to form strong barriers that prevent young people from obtaining a prescription from their primary care provider, which, in turn, seems to have increased adolescents' desire for alternative methods of obtaining contraception such as telecontraception: having contraception delivered straight to one's door.

Not only are young people like me and my friends able to determine our need for contraception, but we are also able to self-screen for potential contraindications to birth control pills. In a study by the Indiana University School of Medicine, researchers found that not only did adolescent women and their health care providers usually agree on their potential contraindications, the adolescent women were more likely than their health care providers to report the presence of potential contraindications when they self-screened.

The time for over the counter birth control pills without an age restriction is long overdue. We have evidence of teenage need, support, and safety. The next step toward promoting adolescent health and avoiding unintended pregnancies is over the counter access to birth control pills.

Every morning in class, I hear the abrupt ringing of a classmate's phone alarm. It's time for her birth control pill. As she fumbles through homework and essays to turn off the sound, I exchange glances with my friend from the summer sleepover. “That will be me one day,” she whispers to me. My goal is to make that day arrive as soon as possible not only for her, but for the thousands of other young people who find themselves in a similar situation.

**Source:** <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/why-over-the-counter-birth-control-is-crucial-for-young-people>