

Why Everyone Should Be Talking About IUDs



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America has an unintended pregnancy problem—but one little device could make a big difference if only people were talking about it. The intrauterine device, or IUD, is a one-inch piece of plastic shaped like the letter T. It prevents pregnancy for five to ten years by inhibiting sperm’s ability to reach and fertilize the egg. It is the single most effective form of reversible birth control—20 times more so than the birth control pill and with a failure rate of less than 1% (compared to 18% for condoms). And unlike the pill, which has to be refilled monthly and taken every day at the same time, or condoms, which require application every time in the heat of the moment, the IUD leaves virtually no room for user error because it is inserted by a medical professional and requires no upkeep. That’s especially important given that 40% of pregnancies in the U.S. are the result of incorrect or inconsistent contraception use.

But despite having been available since the 1960s, today fewer than 8% of American women using contraception have an IUD. Sixty-eight percent of Americans ages 18–45 admit knowing “little or nothing” about the IUD and a quarter

couldn't even identify where the *intrauterine* device would be placed in the body.

In Colorado, the Legislature voted this spring against funding a program that has been providing free IUDs and birth control implants to teens—which together are responsible for three-quarters of the state's 40% reduction in teen pregnancy and 35% drop in teen abortion rates. Some of the state legislators mistakenly believed that IUDs are akin to a form of abortion. They're not. Others cited fiscal concerns, ignoring the fact that the program saved the state \$42.5 million in 2010 alone by eliminating health care costs related to teen births. Regardless of the rationale, their no votes were a mistake. The IUD could be the solution to Colorado's, and America's, unintended pregnancy problem, but only if we start to have a conversation about it. Everyone should be talking about the IUD—so women can make informed decisions about their bodies, and elected officials can make the right calls on policies and programs that expand access to IUDs, thereby reducing unintended pregnancies, lowering the abortion rate, and saving taxpayer dollars.

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