

# How FDA-approved contraceptive methods work

by [Cathy Lynn Grossman](#)

January 28, 2014

c. 2014 Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS) The Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate specifies women should be offered insurance coverage with no co-payment for all contraceptive methods approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

An FDA web site explains the four major methods of contraception and how they work.

## **Barrier methods**

Prevent fertilization by blocking sperm before it can reach the egg. Examples: Condoms, sponges, spermicides used with a diaphragm or a cervical cap.

## **Hormonal methods**

Work by "interfering with ovulation and possibly fertilization." Examples include a skin patch, the vaginal ring, two types of pills and a shot:

- The "combined pill," the patch and the ring each have two hormones (estrogen and progestin) that combine to prevent ovulation, and may also prevent sperm from reaching the egg.
- A progestin-only "mini pill" acts to keep sperm from getting to the egg. Less often, it stops ovulation.
- A progestin shot stops ovulation or prevents sperm from reaching the egg.

## **Implanted Devices**

Inserted in the body, an intrauterine device (known as an IUD) or a contraceptive rod with progestin, work by preventing sperm from reaching or fertilizing the egg, and may prevent implantation.

### **Emergency contraception**

Used within three days of unprotected sex, they come in two major forms:

- Plan B, Plan B One-Step and Next Choice (levonorgestrel) work mainly by preventing ovulation, preventing fertilization, or by preventing implantation.
- Ella (ulipristal acetate) works primarily by stopping or delaying ovulation. It may also prevent implantation.