

# Just the FACTS

## African American women and Reproductive Health



The reproductive health of African American women has to become a greater priority for legislators and activists. African American women are adversely affected by reproductive health services and policies in areas ranging from access to adequate family planning resources to the devastating affects of HIV/AIDS in the African American community. Statistics show that African American women and low-income women, who are disproportionately African American, are most likely to be affected by public policies and private agendas that prevent them from realizing full reproductive autonomy.

### HIV/AIDS, other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's), and new prevention methods

- The rate of Chlamydia infection among African American women (1,722 per 100,000) was nearly eight times the rate among white women (227 per 100,000) in 2005.
- The rate of Chlamydia infections among African American men (645 per 100,000) was more than 11 times that of white men (57.3 per 100,000).
- In 2005 the gonorrhea rate among African Americans was 18 times the rate among whites.
- African Americans make up only 12% of the population, but accounted for one-half of the estimated new HIV/AIDS diagnosis in 2005.
- AIDS was the number one cause of death among African American women ages 25-34 in 2004.
- Heterosexual contact is currently the greatest risk factor for African American women contracting HIV/AIDS.
- Currently, the only option for prevention against HIV is a condom.
- Microbicides are a new class of products under development that a woman could use vaginally, and possibly rectally, to protect herself and her partner from HIV and other STI's.
- A microbicide could be produced in many forms: a gel, cream, or sponge that would release an active ingredient over a period of time. It could also be in the form of an intra-vaginal ring that could be used for months at a time.
- Microbicides would give women the power to protect themselves and not depend on their partners to use a condom.
- HPV or the human papillomavirus is a sexually transmitted virus that can lead to the development of cervical cancer.
- By age 50, at least 80% of women will have acquired genital HPV infection.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved a HPV vaccine for females 9-26.

### Contraception, Abortion, and Public Funding

- Over one-third of U.S. women need publicly funded contraceptive services and supplies because their income is below 250% of the federal poverty level.
- Non-use of contraception is greatest among those who are young, African American, Hispanic, or less educated.
- African American women are almost four times as likely as white women to have an abortion.
- Over 60% of abortions in the U.S. are among women with one or more children.
- Women living below the federal poverty level (\$9,570 for a single woman with no children) are four times more likely than women living above 300% of the federal poverty level (\$28,710 for a single woman with no children) to have an abortion.
- In Illinois, abortion is covered by insurance policies for public employees only in cases of life endangerment.

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- The Hyde Amendment restricts states use of Medicaid (federal funding) for abortions, except in cases of rape, incest, or medical necessity.\*
- In Illinois, abortion is covered by Medicaid only under the Hyde Amendment restrictions.
- Hyde Amendment restrictions extend to women in the military, peace corps, and state employees.
- The Hyde Amendment restricts access to reproductive healthcare services for low-income women, particularly women of color.

### **Emergency Contraception**

- EC is currently available over-the-counter for women 18 and older.
- EC is *not* the same as a medical abortion or the French abortion pill RU-486.
- EC *prevents* pregnancy; it does not terminate a pregnancy.
- EC will not harm a pregnancy if a woman is already pregnant.
- EC can be effective if taken within 3-5 days of unprotected intercourse.
- EC is safe for women of child-bearing age.
- EC could reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy among teens and young women, thereby reducing the number of abortions.
- Women seeking EC are also at risk for STI's, HIV, and the human papillomavirus or HPV and should be given information regarding treatment and prevention

### **Feminine Hygiene Products**

- Most doctors and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist (ACOG) suggest that women steer clear of douching.
- It is estimated that 20-40 percent of U.S. women ages 15-44 douche regularly.
- Studies show that African American women douche at approximately twice the rate of Caucasian women.
- In an AAWE 2001 survey of 300 African American women, over half (52%) of respondents douched. 37% douched at least once per month, and 23% douched more than once per month.
- Douching can break down the healthy bacteria or vaginal flora, which serves as the vagina's defense against infections.
- Douching can spread existing vaginal infections to the uterus, fallopian tubes, and the ovaries.
- Women who douche regularly have an increased risk of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and bacterial vaginosis or BV.
- Douching can make the vagina more susceptible to STI's.
- Douching may increase a women's risk of having an ectopic pregnancy.

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\* The Hyde Amendment was passed in 1976 by Congress and attached to the annual federal spending bill in response to Roe v. Wade restricting the use of federal funds for abortion services.