

# Community College Students Want to Use More Effective Birth Control Methods But Can't Always Get What They Want

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## INTRODUCTION

Female community college students who have a child while in college are 65% more likely to drop out than those who don't. Community college students experience several risk factors for having a child before they are ready. Many are between the ages of 18 and 24, which is the age group that has the highest rates of unintended pregnancy and births. Many are also lower-income and racial/ethnic minority students, groups that are more likely to experience an unintended pregnancy or birth than higher income women and non-Latina white women. Community college students are also less likely than four-year college students to have health insurance or access to reproductive health services from on-campus health centers.

In this brief, the authors examine if community college students want to use more effective birth control methods and, if so, whether they are able to access those methods.

Methods of birth control that are more effective include those for which nine or fewer women in 100 will get pregnant while using the method over the course of a year. The IUD and implant (which are sometimes called long-acting reversible contraception, or LARC) are the most effective of these methods; fewer than one woman per 100 per year will get pregnant while using one. Hormonal methods such as the pill, ring, patch, or shot, are also considered more effective. Condoms, withdrawal, and natural family planning are considered less effective methods.

This brief focuses on the results for 966 young women from three community colleges in Dallas, South Texas and West Texas who provided complete information and were considered at risk of unintended pregnancy.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

These findings suggest that improving information about and access to health insurance coverage and low-cost contraception could increase community college students' use of more effective methods of birth control. This could help community college students have children when they are ready, thus improving their chances of successfully completing college.

Community colleges could implement several strategies to help students avoid having a child before they are ready. Colleges could provide information about enrolling in public or private health insurance—as well as information about pregnancy prevention and birth control methods—during orientation, in academic courses and events on campus, and through peer-to-peer and staff-to-student mentoring. Colleges could also connect students with local family planning clinics by, for example, providing links to clinic finders on the college website. Clinics, state health officials, and other groups that administer subsidized family planning programs could also improve outreach to community college students.

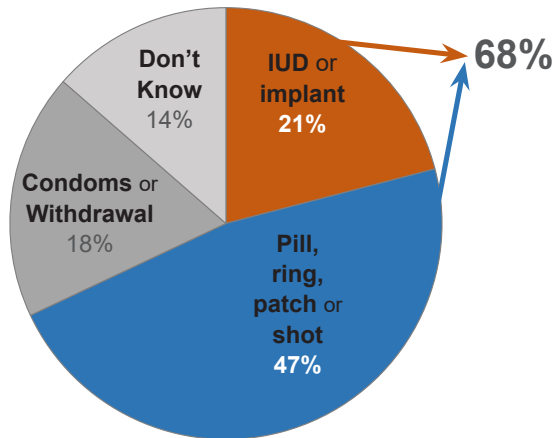
## KEY FINDINGS

- > Overall, 68% of the women wanted to be using more effective birth control methods but only 30% were actually using them (*see figure*).
- > 21% of young women in the study wanted to use an IUD or implant but only 9% were using one of these LARC methods.
- > 47% wanted to use the pill, ring, patch, or shot, but less than half, 21%, were using a hormonal method.
- > Only 18% of women said they wanted to use condoms or withdrawal but three times that many, 54%, were using one of these less effective methods.
- > 16% of women surveyed used no birth control method at all.
- > Among the young women who wanted to use more effective birth control methods but were not, top reasons were financial, such as not being able to afford the method, and informational, such as not knowing where to get the method.

## BIRTH CONTROL PREFERENCES AND USE AMONG TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

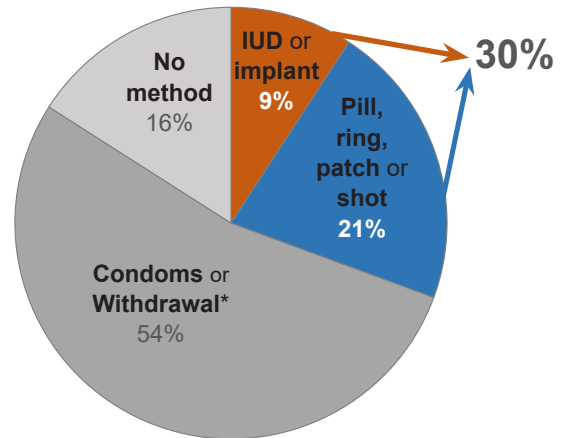
### Method Preferred

“If you could use any birth control method you wanted, what method would you use?”



### Method Using

“What birth control method are you (or your partner) using?”



This figure<sup>1</sup> shows that 68% of Texas community college students at risk of pregnancy wanted to be using the IUD, implant, pill, ring, patch, or shot but only 30% were actually using these more effective methods.

\*<1% (8 students) used a natural family planning method.

### REFERENCE

<sup>1</sup>Hopkins, K, Hubert, C, Coleman-Minahan, K, Stevenson, A.J, White, K., Grossman, D, & Potter, J.E. (2018). Unmet demand for short-acting hormonal and long-acting reversible contraception among community college students in Texas. *Journal of American College Health*.

### SUGGESTED CITATION

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