

News Release

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Health care law gives women control over their care, offers free preventive services to 47 million women

Forty-seven million women are getting greater control over their health care and access to eight new prevention-related health care services without paying more out of their own pocket beginning Aug. 1, 2012, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced today.

Previously some insurance companies did not cover these preventive services for women at all under their health plans, while some women had to pay deductibles or copays for the care they needed to stay healthy. The new rules in the health care law requiring coverage of these services take effect at the next renewal date – on or after Aug. 1, 2012—for most health insurance plans. For the first time ever, women will have access to even more life-saving preventive care free of charge.

According to a new HHS report also released today, approximately 47 million women are in health plans that must cover these new preventive services at no charge. Women, not insurance companies, can now make health decisions that will keep them healthy, catch potentially serious conditions at an earlier state, and protect them and their families from crushing medical bills.

“President Obama is moving our country forward by giving women control over their health care,” Secretary Sebelius said. “This law puts women and their doctors, not insurance companies or the government, in charge of health care decisions.”

The eight new prevention-related services are:

- Well-woman visits.
- Gestational diabetes screening that helps protect pregnant women from one of the most serious pregnancy-related diseases.
- Domestic and interpersonal violence screening and counseling.
- FDA-approved contraceptive methods, and contraceptive education and counseling.
- Breastfeeding support, supplies, and counseling.
- HPV DNA testing, for women 30 or older.
- Sexually transmitted infections counseling for sexually-active women.
- HIV screening and counseling for sexually-active women.

The health care law has already helped women in private plans and Medicare for the first time gain access to potentially life-saving tests and services, such as mammograms, cholesterol screenings, and flu shots without coinsurance or deductibles. Today's announcement builds on these benefits, generally requiring insurance companies to offer, with no copay, additional vital screenings and tests to help keep women healthy throughout their lives.

These services are based on recommendations from the Institute of Medicine, which relied on independent physicians, nurses, scientists, and other experts as well as evidence-based research to develop its recommendations. These preventive services will be offered without cost sharing beginning today in all new health plans.

Group health plans and issuers that have maintained grandfathered status are not required to cover these services. In addition, certain nonprofit religious organizations, such as churches and schools, are not required to cover these services. The Obama administration will continue to work with all employers to give them the flexibility and resources they need to implement the health care law in a way that protects women's health while making common-sense accommodations for values like religious liberty.

For women who are pregnant or nursing, the new preventive services include gestational diabetes screening as well as breast-feeding support, counseling and supplies. Health services already provided under the health care law include folic acid supplements for women who may become pregnant, Hepatitis B screening for pregnant women, and anemia screening for pregnant women.

Women Medicare beneficiaries may already receive such preventive services as annual wellness visits, mammograms, and bone mass measurement for those at risk of osteoporosis and diabetes screening. Approximately 24.7 million women with Medicare used at least one free preventive service in 2011, including the new annual wellness visit.

Because of the Affordable Care Act, secure, affordable coverage is becoming a reality for millions of American women and families. Men and children are also able to take advantage of preventive services at no extra charge under the health care law. These services include flu shots and other immunizations, screenings for cancers, high blood pressure and cholesterol, and depression.

To learn more about the health care services you may be eligible for at no extra charge under the Affordable Care Act, go to <http://www.healthcare.gov/prevention>

For information about the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report on the number of adult and adolescent women eligible for the preventive services at no charge after Aug. 1, 2012, see <http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/2012/womensPreventiveServicesACA/ib.shtml>

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