

# Insurance won't pay for the pill?

You're not alone. But things are starting to change

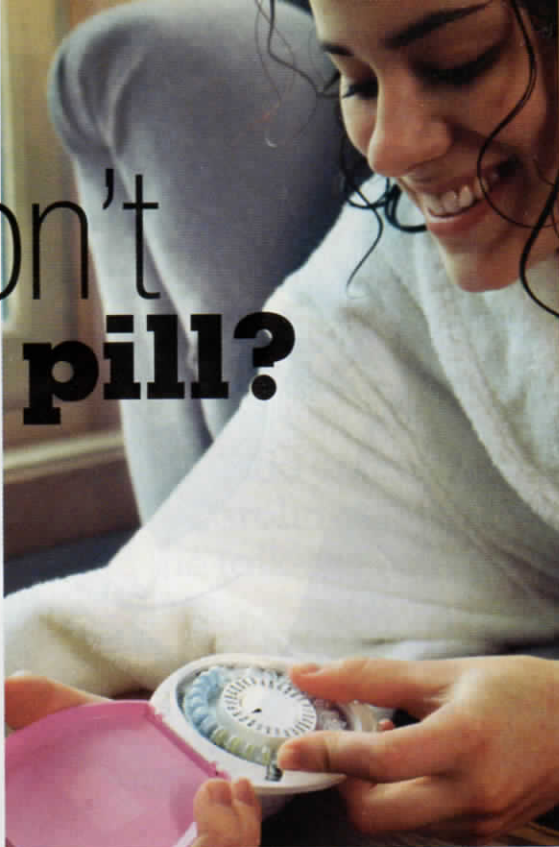
**A**lthough the pill has been available for more than 40 years, many employers' health plans still don't cover prescription contraception, even when they cover other prescription drugs, including Viagra. Some employers, like Catholic schools and hospitals, don't want their insurance to cover the pill for religious reasons, while others maintain that adding coverage would dramatically increase costs. But several lawmakers thought that excluding contraception from prescription benefits was unfair, and as a result, things are beginning to change.

Two separate rulings—one in December 2000 by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and another in June 2001 by a federal court in Seattle—found that an employer's failure to provide insurance coverage for prescription contraceptives when it covers other preventive prescription drugs is unlawful sex discrimination. Although these rulings will favorably affect future legal

decisions about the issue, there is as yet no federal law specifically requiring employers to cover contraception.

Last year Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) and Representative James Greenwood (R-Pennsylvania) introduced federal legislation called The Equity in Prescription Insurance and Contraceptive Coverage Act (EPICC) that would prohibit insurance plans from excluding or restricting coverage of prescription contraception, if they cover other prescription drugs. (Congress is expected to vote on the bill this fall.) EPICC is supported by such groups as the American Medical Association and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

In the meantime, some states are taking action. Currently, 20 states have laws or regulations requiring that health plans cover prescription contraception, some of which contain



waivers for employers or insurers with religious objections. That means only half of America's 63 million women of childbearing age have contraception coverage. If you're interested in contacting your legislators or employer about this issue, the following groups have Web sites that provide a step-by-step guide and offer sample letters: Planned Parenthood: [www.covermypills.com](http://www.covermypills.com); The National Women's Law Center: [www.nwlc.org/pill4us](http://www.nwlc.org/pill4us); or call 866-745-5487. —Rachel Rabkin

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## body briefs

### Chew on this

Kids don't want to take their daily vitamin? Give them a Vitaball—a vitamin-based gum ball that provides children ages 6 to 13 with 11 vitamins in just five to 10 minutes of chewing. To find Vitaball, call 800-722-3476 or log onto [www.vitaball.com](http://www.vitaball.com).



### Smoking parents=fewer boys

Researchers in Japan and Denmark asked nearly 5,400 women about their smoking habits; they found that parents who both smoked more than 20 cigarettes a day while trying to conceive lowered their probability of having a boy compared to nonsmoking parents.

### Zoloft approved for PMDD

The anti-depressant Zoloft was recently approved by the FDA for treating Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD), a severe form of Premenstrual Syndrome. In studies, Zoloft was significantly more effective than placebo in treating PMDD.

—Dominique Andrews