Hormonal Birth Control Demonstrations

A note about this exercise: A typical Teen Talk approach is to take a topic that requires information-giving (lecture style) and to make it interactive by getting youth to guess or participate by answering direct questions. The following activity will illustrate how this strategy might look. This can look many different ways, and the number of questions can be reduced, depending on the youth and their willingness to participate. If youth are not actively participating, the facilitator can decide to switch back to a basic, lecture style.

Goals:
- To demonstrate common hormonal BC used by teens.
- To explain what hormonal birth control is and how it works.
- To let youth know where and how they can access it.
- To highlight: the importance of following instructions, side effects, and medication interactions.

Have Ready:
- Demonstration versions of the Pill, Depo Provera, the Patch, NuvaRing and ECP.
- A birth control kit can be ordered through the Sexuality and Education Resource Center in Winnipeg for $60 (www.serc.mb.ca).

Instructions:
Hormonal Methods
“What types of hormonal birth control have you heard of?” (the pill, the patch, Depo-Provera, and the NuvaRing). Explain to youth that these birth control methods contain synthetic hormones (versions of estrogen and/or progesterone) made in a lab that a girl/woman would put into her body.

If someone chooses to take hormonal birth control, it increases the amount of hormones in the body which prevents the egg from being released (ovulation). No ovulation = no pregnancy. Hormonal birth control is very effective at preventing pregnancy (92-98% for a typical user) when it is used correctly. If pregnancy does occur with hormonal birth control it is usually due to incorrect use.

Follow Directions
The pill is taken at the same time every day, Depo is a shot every 84 days, the ring is worn for 3 weeks, and the patch is worn for a week at a time, for 3 weeks. (See Peer Support Manual for more detail on hormonal birth control.)

“What would happen if someone forgot to take their birth control pill?” Hormone levels would drop and an egg could be released. This person has a chance of becoming pregnant if having penis-vagina sex (and not using another form birth control). If you miss pills, or are taking medication either prescription or over the counter that decreases the pill’s effectiveness, or your patch falls off, ring falls out, or you are late for your Depo shot) you won’t be protected from pregnancy. “Use a condom as a back-up form of birth control until a healthcare provider or pharmacist says you can rely on your hormonal method again.”
Other Medication
Certain medications, both prescribed and over-the-counter, like St. John’s Wort and some antibiotics can reduce the effectiveness of the birth control pill. If medication does affect the birth control, it is important to use a back-up method, like condoms. Drugs and alcohol do not interfere with birth control unless you forget to take it/vomit up the pill. Drugs/alcohol may impair your decision-making ability.
(FYI: The pill becomes effective after the first month.)

Side Effects
“Have you heard of any side effects of hormonal birth control?” These can include regular periods, lighter periods (people who have painful menstrual cramps are often given the pill to ease this), no periods at all, spotting (bleeding at times other than period days), weight change (loss/gain), tender breasts, more/less acne, migraines, mood swings, decreased sex drive, and a risk of (increased) depression. Tell your healthcare provider if you have a history of depression, because estrogen can make depression worse.

Depo has also been shown to decrease bone density in people who are on it consecutively for more than 2 years. Youth should ask their healthcare provider if they have concerns.
(FYI: “There have been cases of osteoporosis and fracture [broken bones] associated with the use of Depo-Provera.”¹ In 2005 Health Canada issued a public advisory [from Pfizer] saying Depo “should be used for the shortest period of time possible. The risks and benefits of treatment should be carefully re-evaluated on a regular basis in all users of this drug.”²)

Since the pill can also reduce acne, lighten periods, and reduce period cramps can you assume that someone with pills in their locker or bag is sexually active? No.

Often youth express concern or fear about gaining weight due to hormonal methods of birth control. Weight gain can be from a normal growing and changing body, and if there are sudden weight increases or decreases speak to a health care practitioner. If it comes up, you may want to briefly address how pressure from the media to be thin can affect our reproductive rights and choices.
(FYI: Depo is made from synthetic progesterone and can stimulate the appetite. Encourage youth to talk to their healthcare provider about if they are concerned about the possibility of gaining some weight. (See Peer Support manual for additional information.)

Encourage youth to go to their healthcare provider if they experience side-effects.
(FYI: People who smoke and take birth control containing estrogen can be at risk of developing blood clots and circulatory problems. This can be compounded if they are taking a pill that is high in estrogen, have been taking the pill for a long period of time [10-15 years], if they are over 30 years of age, and if there is a history of heart disease in their family. Folks who smoke should be honest with their healthcare provider in order to be on the appropriate pill. Smoking will interact with estrogen, so a healthcare provider may prescribe progesterone-only pills, IUD/IUS, or Depo instead.)

Emergency Contraception or the “Morning After Pill”
“What can you do if a condom breaks/there was no protection/ there was a sexual assault…?” ECP is the only birth control you can take after unprotected sex. If you did not use

protection for whatever reason, a condom broke, forgot birth control pills, or weren’t prepared, or if there was a sexual assault, you can try to prevent a pregnancy with ECP.

The emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) or Plan B works best the sooner it is taken. The name, “morning after pill” is misleading because ECP may be used up to 72 hours (3 days) after unprotected intercourse. ECP stops ovulation or slows the egg's travel down the fallopian tube, makes the lining of the uterus slippery and creates a thick mucus plug.

Some of the side effects are possible nausea and spotting. Explain that some people feel nauseous after taking ECP because of the high hormone dosages, while others are not affected. If the pills are thrown up or diarrhea occurs **within** four hours of taking ECP, the pills may need to be taken again. ECP will not cause abortion and does not prevent sexually transmitted infections.

(FYI: All Winnipeg teen clinics give out progesterone only Plan B, which is less likely to cause nausea. If someone felt ill and vomited soon after taking ECP, they would need to take another dose. If the pills are thrown up or diarrhoea occurs after four hours of taking ECP the pills do not need to be taken again.)

If youth want to access ECP, encourage them to call the health centre or hospital ahead and ask if they have it in stock, if they can come to get it (some healthcare providers do not prescribe ECP to youth), and ask how much it will cost. Where there are teen clinics, teens can access ECP even on non-teen clinic days. If it’s not a teen clinic day, encourage youth try to calling ahead to any of the clinics on the resource sheet, and ask if they can come to get ECP (just to be sure that the clinic has it). It usually costs $10 if they can afford it, otherwise it’s free. In urban centers Plan B is available at pharmacies without a prescription, it can cost anywhere from $28 at Walmart to $42 at Shopper’s Drug Mart.

**“Within 4-6 weeks of taking ECP, a period should occur. If this doesn’t happen, a pregnancy test should be done.”** This is to check if the youth is pregnant.

Note: Ideally this activity can be followed by a condom demonstration. See the STI chapter for the “Teen Talk Condom Demonstration”.