

Colorado's free birth control experiment spanning 6 years proves to be major success

By ACSH Staff — July 6, 2015



^[1]Recently we wrote about the importance of family planning

services and the significant role they play in public health. And now, a recent *New York Times* [article](#) ^[2] covers Colorado's success in reducing unwanted pregnancy by giving away free long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) to teenagers and low-income women as part of a program called the Colorado Family Planning Initiative (CFPI).

From 2009 to 2013, Colorado's birth rate for teens fell by 40 percent, while the abortion rate fell by 42 percent. Similarly, the rates of unplanned pregnancies plummeted for unmarried women under the age of 25 who had not finished high school. The magnitude of the reductions in Colorado is a strong indication that the CFPI, which was funded by a private grant from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, was a key factor. About twenty percent of Colorado women aged 18 to 44 now use a long-acting birth control method, compared to the national average of about 9 percent.

[The American Council on Science and Health](#) ^[3] has previously [written](#) ^[4] on the [benefits](#) ^[5] of LARCs hormonal implants and IUDs which are [recommended](#) ^[6] by pediatricians as safe and effective for teenage girls. The failure rate for the pill is about 5 percent, compared with less than 1 percent for LARCs.

Providing women with effective birth control methods has a significant financial benefit as well. Long-acting devices can cost between \$800 and \$900, however the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE) estimated that for every dollar spent on Colorado's LARC program, an average of \$5.85 was avoided within a three-year period by the Colorado Medicaid program. The CDPHE [estimates](#) ^[7] that Colorado saved between \$49 million and \$111 million in birth-related Medicaid costs.

Additionally, preventing unintended pregnancy allows teenage girls and young women time to finish their educations driving economic gains and leading to higher long-term improvements in all measurements of standards of living.

While LARCs significantly reduce the rates of teen pregnancy and abortion, it is important to note that like other birth control methods, they do not protect against sexually transmitted infections.

Girls and women who use LARCs should still use barrier methods of protection such as a condom and get the HPV vaccination.

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Links

- [1] <http://www.freeimages.com/browse.phtml?f=download&id=1228123&redirect=photo>
- [2] http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/07/06/science/colorados-push-against-teenage-pregnancies-is-a-startling-success.html?emc=edit_th_20150706&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=12253159&_r=1&referrer=
- [3] <http://acsh.org/>
- [4] <http://acsh.org/2015/04/long-acting-reversible-contraceptives-use-by-teens-on-the-rise-still-not-enough/>
- [5] <http://acsh.org/2015/03/long-acting-reversible-contraceptives-becoming-method-of-choice-for-many-women/>
- [6] <http://acsh.org/2014/10/pediatricians-recommend-iuds-hormonal-implants-teen-girls/>
- [7] https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/HPF_FP_UP-Cost-Avoidance-and-Medicaid.pdf