

## Recommendations for Contraceptive Use during COVID-19 Pandemic

These recommendations were formulated by the representatives of DGFP, DGHS, OGSB, UNFPA, DFID, USAID, GAC, IPAS, SMC, Pathfinder, jhpeigo, IPPF, options ltd. and other stakeholders, in Zoom Meetings held on 22 and 26 April 2020.

### **BACKGROUND**

- There is a global consensus on the importance of making voluntary family planning available to all women. Not only is access to family planning a human right, but it saves lives and promotes healthier populations, more efficient systems and stronger economies.
- Contraception and family planning information and services are life-saving and important at all times. Sexual activity does not cease even with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. By preventing unintended pregnancies, contraception helps to protect girls and women from the negative health consequences of unintended pregnancies. Contraception also reduces the need for termination of pregnancy, resulting in reduced risk of women and girls facing unsafe abortion. Therefore, contraception is life-saving.
- Recent projections from UNFPA reveal that if the lockdown continues on for a period of 6 months, 47 million women in low- and middle-income countries may not be able to access contraception, and that 7 million unintended pregnancies are expected to occur globally. In Bangladesh, too, it is expected that unintended pregnancies will increase due to limited access to family planning information and services during this pandemic situation. This will have a negative impact on an already strained health system, and complications that arise from termination of pregnancy will further worsen the situation.

### **GENERAL INFORMATION FOR CLIENTS OR COUPLES**

- As the effect of the virus is still unknown on pregnancy and the fetus, all pregnancies should be planned keeping in view the overall situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To ensure infection prevention and control of COVID-19, everyone, including pregnant mothers, must take the precautionary measures according to the WHO guidelines, which are to:
  - Regularly and thoroughly clean hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;

- Maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance between yourself and others;
  - Avoid going to crowded places;
  - Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth;
  - Make sure to follow good respiratory hygiene -this means covering the mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when cough or sneeze (should follow coughing and sneezing behavior). Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash hands.
  - Should wear mask (100%) when going outside of home.
- If one of the couples or partner has any COVID 19 like symptom, they should stay home and self-isolate even with minor symptoms such as cough, headache, mild fever, until recover. During self-isolation period, partners should maintain physical distance and avoid any physical contact.
  - All modern methods of contraception are safe to use, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have had a baby in the last six months or have a health condition, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, breast cancer, or smoke, seek advice from a health care professional to ensure using a method of contraception which is suitable and safe. However, if these conditions are in control, you can continue using your current contraceptive method. Based on the decision of one's family size always prefer to use long acting and permanent methods.
  - Couples should start or continue to use your contraceptive method of choice. You may be able to access information and contraceptive services from a healthcare provider by phone or online or **Hotline number (16767)**.
  - If you cannot access these services, you may need to opt for a method that is available without a prescription (such as condoms, pills, injectable or emergency contraceptive pills) from a nearby pharmacy or drug shop.
  - If you cannot access contraceptive method of choice perhaps because it requires a prescription, or because it can only be given by a health worker consider using condoms, fertility awareness-based methods, lactational amenorrhea (if exclusively breastfeeding), or other contraceptive methods that are recommended for self-care. The recommended self-care methods could include the pill or mini-pill, emergency contraception pills, and Injectable (DMPA- Subcutaneous, Sayana Press®). However natural methods are risky if the instructions are not followed properly and can led to unwanted pregnancy
  - During the lock down, the schedule of Injectable contraceptives may have been hampered. They can be taken within 28 days of the missed schedule. Communicate with the service provider to get your injection.
  - Condoms, when they are used consistently and correctly, are the only method of contraception that helps to prevent unintended pregnancy and protect against sexually transmitted infections, including

HIV. Condoms can be used together with other methods of contraception to protect against both unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

- Emergency contraceptive pills can prevent up to 95% of pregnancies when taken within 5 days after any unsafe intercourse, and they can be taken by anyone with or without a health condition. Remember emergency contraceptive pills should not be used regularly and not more than once in a month.
- If you suspect pregnancy, do not use any unapproved medicines or try Menstrual Regulation with Medicines (e.g. MR kits, Cytomis®) at home WITHOUT consultation with your OBGYN/doctor. This can become a life threatening issue.
- If women are using an IUD or Implant that still has expiry dates, we recommend to continue the use as these are completely safe and provides long term protection against unwanted pregnancies.
- For removal of long acting methods such as implants or IUDs, after the recommended period of use, seek advice from health provider. If, due to restrictions on movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, cannot have long acting method removed straight away, it is important to use another method of contraception to avoid pregnancy at this time. There are no medical problems caused by delaying removal of long acting methods such as implants or IUDs. Do not try to remove the contraceptive method at home; wait until you are able to access health care from a trained provider.
- All kinds of Contraceptive methods are available as usual in different Government hospitals, private and NGO outlets and Pharmacies / medicine shops. At present short acting contraceptive services are available at the UH&FWC/ satellite clinics provided by FWV, FWA and CHCP at Community clinics.
- When visiting a hospital or clinic, clients should wear mask; maintain distance with the service providers and other clients; wash hand before going and after coming from hospital.

## **DIRECTION FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS AND POLICY MAKERS**

### **Services Providers Should**

- All service providers, especially OBGYN and FP service Providers providing Sexual and Reproductive Health Services, should increase use of mobile phones and digital technologies to increase telephonic counselling and sharing of messages related to safe and effective use of contraceptives.
- When possible, especially in antenatal, delivery care services and postnatal care with proper counselling and consent, ensure immediate post-partum contraceptive services (preferably PPIUD, PP Implant or tubal ligation) to avoid any unwanted pregnancy.

## Telehealth Contraception during the Time of COVID-19

As organizations move to telehealth visits, the following guidelines and resources can help.

- Continue to provide high quality counseling and contraceptive methods.
  - [Contraception Counseling](#):
    - Provide telehealth patient-centered counseling on range of methods & patient priorities.
  - [Contraception Initiation](#):
    - Avoid delays by sending prescriptions to pharmacy, mailing, or pre-packing for pick up from the providers.
  - [Assess risk of pregnancy](#)
    - Need in-person visit for IUD, implant, sterilization, +/- DMPA
    - Delay visit if COVID-19 symptoms, pending test results, or asymptomatic contact
    - Initiate a bridging method as needed.
  - [Contraception Continuation](#)
    - Use evidence-based extended use for all methods
    - Advise condoms, initiate bridging methods
    - IUD and Implants using extended durations.

### Contraceptive Change or Discontinuation

- IUD and implant removal is an essential reproductive health service. Assure removal on request will be facilitated.
- Removal of IUD/ Implants can be delayed by few weeks.
- IUD and implant insertion or removal are low risk, non-aerosol generating procedures. To minimizing exposure risk during procedures, routine surgical masks and gloves for patient interactions may reduce asymptomatic transmission. Prepare all equipment trays and materials ahead of time to reduce time in the room.

### Government and non-Government (Policy Makers, Managers) Should

- Ensure enough supply of Contraceptive Methods at all service centers and shops and with the service providers.
- Supportive supervision for monitoring the service providers, especially from the seniors to check with the providers regarding the availability of commodities and the wellbeing of the providers too through direct or virtual communication.
- Governments may also consider relaxing restrictions on the quantities (cycles) of short acting contraceptives dispensed to users so as to avoid frequent repeat visits.

- Develop and disseminate messages with simple language through different communication channels including TVC, TV scrolling, social media, radio, community radio, TV talk show etc.

References:

- <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/contraception-family-planning-and-covid-19>
- <https://beyondthepill.ucsf.edu/contraceptive-care-during-covid-19#minimizing-risk-visits>
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- <https://beyondthepill.ucsf.edu/sites/beyondthepill.ucsf.edu/files/UCSF%20BtP%20COVID-19%20Resources%203-31-20%20%28003%29.pdf>
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