



Family Planning Services Are Essential

To curb the spread of COVID-19 and put less strain on hospitals and clinics, healthcare systems in Wisconsin and nationwide have curtailed non-elective medical care, such as routine eye care visits or cosmetic surgery, during the pandemic. **Family planning services are not elective medical care—they are critical, time-sensitive health care services** declared as urgent by major medical and public health organizations in light of COVID-19. All Wisconsin health systems and insurers should support continued access to these essential services during the pandemic.

In fact, some states have specifically designated family planning services as essential in their **stay-at-home orders**.

These include [Illinois](#), [New Jersey](#), and [Washington](#). Leading health organizations such as the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) have declared that family planning services are lifesaving and essential and should be available and accessible during this crisis.

Sexual activity does not cease with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is therefore crucial to ensure that people are able to access rights-based services and information to initiate and/or continue use of contraception.

[World Health Organization](#)

The impact of restricting access to family planning services

Restricting or limiting access to family planning services can have major consequences for individuals, children, families, and health systems. By limiting whether a person can get a new birth control method or a refill on an existing method, **we interfere with their right to decide whether and when to have children.**

Research shows that unwanted pregnancies diminish people's ability to plan for and achieve their educational and career goals.^{1,2,3} Unwanted pregnancies are also associated with lower rates of early prenatal care⁴ and breastfeeding,^{4,5} and higher risk of low birth weight⁴ and depression.^{4,6}

Supporting **reproductive autonomy** is particularly important during such uncertain, challenging times with growing unemployment and looming economic recession. What's more, we do not yet know much about **COVID-19's impact** on pregnant people, fetuses, and infants.^{7,8,9}

Restricting access to family planning services also leads to **increased demands on the healthcare system** as a result of unplanned pregnancies and the spread of untreated sexually transmitted infections.^{10,11}

Best practices to ensure access to family planning services during the pandemic

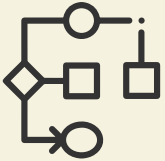
State, national, and international experts recommend the following practices to maintain timely access to family planning without unnecessary barriers during the pandemic:



Telephone screening
to determine when an in-person visit is required



Telehealth
for contraceptive initiation, quick start, self-administration, refills, and managing side effects



Workflows
to support access to IUD and implant insertion and removal



Postpartum
contraception provision

Guidelines for providing contraception during COVID-19

[ACOG](#)

[Beyond the Pill](#)

[Family Planning National Training Center](#)

[Reproductive Health Access Project](#)

[Society for Family Planning](#)

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The University of Wisconsin-Madison Collaborative for Reproductive Equity (UW CORE) is a campus-wide initiative focused on reproductive health research, healthcare access and delivery, policy evaluation, and communication to address critical needs in reproductive health and healthcare in Wisconsin.