

Birth control another rising cost for college students

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College students say that lately they must pay more money for the staples they can't do without.

More money for books, for fuel, for food — and for some students, more money for birth-control pills.

"Everything is so expensive," said Rachel Maitert, a freshman at Kent State University Stark Campus.

Without health insurance, Maitert faced a steep price tag of \$75 a month for birth control pills at pharmacies. Using her father's insurance plan, Maitert says, it's somewhat more affordable, about \$100 every three months.

Still, she also has to budget for pricey computer and business books and increased food costs.

Due to a change in federal law, some young women are paying three times more money to fill their prescriptions at university health clinics than in past years. An American College Health Association study found that slightly more than one-third of undergraduate women reported in 2007 that they relied on oral contraceptives to prevent pregnancy.

NOT AVAILABLE EVERYWHERE

Two local universities — Kent State University's Kent Campus and the University of Akron — dispense birth control pills at campus health centers. The rest, including Kent State's Stark Campus, do not. Malone College's single students even sign a community agreement that includes abstaining from sexual activity.

At the University of Akron, the cost for a pack of generic birth control pills has tripled from \$5 to \$15. That means the 400 students who use the campus clinic to obtain birth control must come up with an extra \$90 for the pills during the nine months they're in class.

"It's still a bargain; however, for college students with no money, it makes a difference for them," said Diane Fashinpaur, director of health services at the University of Akron. "What used to cover three months now only covers one."

The price change came about when U.S. lawmakers set stricter limits for prescription drug rebates that are covered by Medicaid. The stricter limits essentially eliminated pharmaceutical manufacturers' ability to give university health centers and low-income clinics large discounts on contraceptives.

LOBBY FOR REVERSAL

Planned Parenthood has been one of the leading agencies pressing to get legislation reversed. Mary O'Shea, director of media and advocacy for Planned Parenthood of Northeast Ohio, said the agency worries that some young women no longer will obtain contraception due to the high prices. The agency also believes the provision was inadvertently included in the law, she said.

Canton hosted nearly 200 people from Planned Parenthood of Northeast Ohio on Wednesday for an annual meeting that celebrated local leadership, regional strength and global reach. Speakers emphasized that family planning and women's reproductive rights are not only a local issue.

Planned Parenthood has been helping the rural Indian community of Jamshedpur improve its maternal health services since 2001. Bonnie Bolitho, former executive director of Planned Parenthood of Stark County, also announced the establishment of a new fund in her name that supports family planning work for international communities.

"It's important that we support women in developing countries, just as we support women here," Bolitho said.

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