

# Special Population: CONTRACEPTION FOR WOMEN SMOKERS

The consequences of smoking, such as increased risk of cancer and respiratory diseases, are generally the same for both women and men. However, some smoking-related health problems are unique to women. One such problem is the effect of smoking on contraceptive options, specifically those utilizing hormonal agents.

Of great importance is the effect of agents, such as combined oral contraceptives (COCs), on the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, such as stroke, heart attack, and blood clot formation, especially in women smokers 35 years of age and above. Smoking also increases the risk of cervical cancer and early menopause for women and results in adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as low birth weight infants, abortion, stillbirth, and perinatal mortality. Infertility problems may also arise among women smokers.



## RECOMMENDED METHODS

### Progestin-only contraceptives

- These contraceptives include progestin-only pills, depot medroxyprogesterone acetate/norethisterone enantate, and levonorgestrel and etonogestrel implants.

### Intrauterine devices (IUDs)

- These devices include copper-bearing IUD and levonorgestrel-releasing IUD.

### Barriers

- Barriers include condoms, spermicides, diaphragm, and cervical cap.

### Sterilization

- Sterilization includes tubal ligation and vasectomy.

*The absence of estrogen use in the above methods make them safe and acceptable options for smokers, regardless of age and number of cigarettes consumed per day (MEC 1).*

### Combined hormonal contraceptives (CHCs)

- Women who smoke and are less than 35 years of age can use the following agents (MEC 2): COC pills, combined injectable contraceptives, combined contraceptive patch, and combined contraceptive vaginal rings.
- For women over 35 years of age who consume less than 15 cigarettes per day, only CICs fall under this category (MEC 2).

## METHODS TO AVOID

(SMOKERS OLDER THAN 35 YEARS OLD WHO CONSUME 15 OR MORE CIGARETTES PER DAY)

### CHCs: COC pills, CICs, combined contraceptive patch, combined contraceptive vaginal rings

- For women over 35 who smoke less than 15 sticks daily, COC pills, combined contraceptive patch, and combined vaginal rings should be avoided because risks are greater than the advantages from their use (MEC 3).
- If a woman smokes at least 15 sticks a day, then all four of these methods are unacceptable (MEC 4) because of the higher risks of cardiovascular

diseases, such as heart attacks (myocardial infarction). These risks increase with the number of cigarettes consumed per day. In such cases, the woman is encouraged to quit smoking and should be assisted in the selection of safe birth control alternatives.