



# Over the counter or available from a pharmacy?

We break down the differences between these two innovative types of birth control access

So you heard the pill is "over the counter" (OTC) in California, Oregon, and Washington and may be coming to other states soon! While that would be very exciting, it is not exactly right. *The pill is not yet available OTC*. In these states, pharmacists are now allowed to *prescribe* the pill and other hormonal methods, including the birth control patch, the vaginal ring, and/or the shot.

So you no longer have to see a doctor for that Rx. While this is a **BIG** step forward in expanding access for millions of people, it is not the same as being truly over the counter.

Here's how the two models differ:

|                                    | PHARMACY ACCESS   | OTC ACCESS   |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Where the birth control is located | Behind the pharmacy counter   | On store shelves   |
| Prescription required              | Yes<br>Issued by pharmacist   | No   |
| Doctor visit required              | No  | No   |
| Age restriction                    | May apply<br>For example, California's pharmacy bill does not have an age restriction; Oregon's has an age restriction of 18+ unless the minor has a previous prescription                        | May apply<br>There was a long legal fight before emergency contraception was approved for women of all ages; the OCs OTC Working Group wants to see an OTC pill on the drug store shelf without an age restriction |
| Insurance coverage                 | Yes<br>Insurer may or may not cover the fee for a pharmacist to screen women annually   | Depends<br>Some insurers may require a prescription for coverage of OTC methods  |
| Hours of availability              | When a pharmacist is available  | Store hours  |
| Method(s) available                | Many products/brands at a time<br>Methods included depend on the state; for example, Oregon includes all pills and patches; California also includes other methods like the shot and vaginal ring | One product/brand at a time<br>Emergency contraception (like Plan B One-Step) is currently OTC; when a birth control pill becomes available OTC, it will happen one brand at a time                                |
| Religious objections may apply     | Yes<br>In many states, if a pharmacist objects, s/he must refer you to someone who can/will provide   | Yes<br>Store may refuse to stock it  |
| Mechanism to happen                | State by state legislation  | FDA approval, nationwide   |

For more information go to [www.FreeThePill.org](http://www.FreeThePill.org)