



# National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

## NAPAWF

1050 17<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., Ste 250  
Washington, DC 20036  
T (202) 293-2688; F (202) 293-4507  
[www.napawf.org](http://www.napawf.org)

### Expanding Reproductive Choice for Young APA Women: A Fact Sheet

For young Asian and Pacific American (APA) women, reproductive justice includes the ability to access a broad range of contraceptive options, including birth control and emergency contraception, and receive accurate information about sexuality, abstinence, and contraception. Barriers such as lack of health insurance, language, culture, economic status, and geographical location, however, make it difficult, and often impossible, for many young APA women to exercise their right to make well-informed personal decisions about their reproductive health. Further, the lack of research documenting the unique and diverse reproductive needs of APA women, combined with stereotypical images of the APA community as a “model minority,” misrepresent the true health status of Asian and Pacific American women.

#### Why are abstinence-only programs problematic for APA girls?

- ✓ Because issues related to sexuality, pregnancy, and birth control are not discussed in APA households, APA girls are often left to discover this information from their peers, in their schools, or in their communities. Therefore, it is critically important that school-based abstinence and sex education programs are accurate and culturally appropriate.
- ✓ A 2004 report prepared for Congressman Henry Waxman revealed that over 80% of federally-funded abstinence-only-until-marriage programs contained false, misleading, or distorted information about sex and reproductive health.
- ✓ Recently, the Department of Health and Human Services created a website ([www.4parents.gov](http://www.4parents.gov)) to encourage parent-child communication around sexuality. The website, however, contains inaccurate information about abortion and the effectiveness of condoms, and fails to address how cultural beliefs and values affect the manner in which parents talk about sexuality with their children. Moreover, the site fails to address how particular reproductive and sexual health issues affect communities of color.

#### What are the STD rates for young APA women?

- ✓ Although the rate of sexually transmitted diseases is decreasing for the overall population, chlamydia and gonorrhea rates for Asian and Pacific Islanders are increasing.
- ✓ APA women have considerably higher STD rates than APA men, and the incidence of STDs for APA women under age 25 is on the rise.
- ✓ Studies reveal that APA women and girls are least likely of all racial or ethnic groups to discuss STDs with their physician.
- ✓ Another study of young APA women indicated that protecting against STDs was less important than preventing pregnancy. Although over two-third of APA women are sexually active, less than 40% routinely use protection against STDs.

#### What is emergency contraception (EC)?

- ✓ Nearly half of all pregnancies are unintended and more than 50% of these unplanned pregnancies end in abortion. Studies estimate that approximately 1.5 million of the 3 million unintended pregnancies each year could be prevented if women had information and access to emergency contraception (EC).
- ✓ EC is a method of preventing pregnancy after unprotected sex, and is oftentimes referred to as “the morning after pill.” EC pills contain the same hormones as those in regular contraceptive pills, but in higher doses. EC is time-sensitive, and can be effective if administered within 72 hours after unprotected sex. EC will not affect a pregnancy that was established prior to unprotected sex.



# National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

## NAPAWF

1050 17<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., Ste 250  
Washington, DC 20036  
T (202) 293-2688; F (202) 293-4507  
[www.napawf.org](http://www.napawf.org)

- ✓ Studies indicate that few gynecologists and family physicians regularly discuss EC with their patients during routine patient counseling.

### Do APA girls experience high teen pregnancy rates?

- ✓ Although the APA population is generally viewed as having low teen pregnancy and birth rates, a more detailed study that breaks down the data collection by ethnicity reveals that Laotian American girls have the highest teen birth rate of any racial or ethnic group in California. Furthermore, close to 60% of those girls are married at the time they give birth, indicating that promotion of abstinence-only programs may not fully address the needs and concerns of many young APA women.
- ✓ One study found that 61% of surveyed APA women do not regularly use contraceptive methods during sex. The primary reason given for not routinely using contraception was that they trusted their partner and that their relationship was monogamous.

### What barriers do young APA women confront to accessing EC and other forms of contraception?

- ✓ Although studies have found that most APA young women surveyed are aware of EC, over 60% of those same women were confused as to the purpose or parameters of the pills. Thus, lack of knowledge prevents many APA young women and girls from accessing EC in a timely manner.
- ✓ Currently, EC is available in the United States only by a doctor's prescription. Approximately 36% of APA women and girls under age 65 lack health insurance and do not have a regular source of health care, which can create a critical delay in obtaining the product.
- ✓ Moreover, in recent months there has been a surge in the number of pharmacists who refuse to dispense EC or other contraception because of religious or moral objections, further delaying access to the time-sensitive pills.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- ❑ **Support the Prevention First Act** – The Act would expand access to preventive health care services that help reduce unintended pregnancy, reduce the number of abortions, and improve access to women's health care.
- ❑ **Encourage FDA to make EC over the counter for all women** – Barr Pharmaceuticals Inc. recently filed another application to make EC over the counter for women age 16 and older. The FDA has not issued a definitive decision on the application. EC has been proven to be safe, and restricting access to young women is unnecessary and harmful.
- ❑ **Pass the Access to Legal Pharmaceuticals Act** – The Act would require pharmacies to ensure that all prescriptions are filled without delay, even if a pharmacist on staff refuses to dispense certain medications, such as contraceptives or EC, because of moral or religious objections.
- ❑ **Develop comprehensive sex education curriculums that include information about abstinence and contraception and incorporate the unique cultural and linguistic concerns of APA young women** – Creating culturally and linguistically appropriate programs about contraception and abstinence will ensure that APA girls receive accurate and relevant materials about reproductive health.

April 2005

#### *Resources:*

American Public Health Association, *Increasing Access to Emergency Contraception* (2004).  
Center for Reproductive Health Research & Policy and Asians & Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health, *Teen Pregnancy Among Asians and Pacific Islanders in California: Final Report* (2001).  
National Asian Women's Health Organization, *Community Solutions* (2000).  
National Asian Women's Health Organization, *Expanding Options: Reproductive and Sexual Health Survey of Asian American Women* (Jan. 1997).