

# Medical Health Risks of Contraception

Posted: October 23, 2012, by Margaret Datiles Watts

*A summary of the medical data presented in the Women Speak for Themselves amicus brief*

## Oral Contraceptives

### Heart Attack and Stroke –

According to the New England Journal of Medicine, oral contraceptive pills double the risk of heart attack in women. The risk increases for women with hypertension (5x), who smoked (12x), with diabetes (16x), and with high cholesterol (23x). [REF. 1] The British Journal of Medicine reported that oral contraceptives cause an increased risk of ischemic stroke (3x) as well as an increased incidence of blood clots and pulmonary embolism. [REF. 2]



### Breast, Cervical and Liver Cancers –

The Mayo Clinic reported that oral contraceptives increase the risk of breast cancer by 44%. [REF. 3] The World Health Organization's International Agency on Research of Cancer (WHO IARC) officially categorized "the Pill" as a Group 1 carcinogen for breast, cervical and liver cancers. [REF. 4] The Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention journal reported a 320% increased risk of the most dangerous kind of breast cancer – triple negative breast cancer – in women taking oral contraceptives. [REF. 5] The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that there is a 4x greater risk of breast cancer than uterine and ovarian cancers in women taking oral contraceptives. [REF. 6] According to the National Cancer Institute, use of oral contraceptives triples the risk of cervical cancer in women. The NCI also recognized studies showing oral contraceptives increase the risk of liver cancer and rupturing benign liver tumors in women. [REF. 7]

### HIV and STDs –

Women taking oral contraceptives also have a 2x increased risk of contracting genital human papillomavirus (HPV) which leads to cervical cancer, the British Journal of Cancer reported. [REF. 8] According to the Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, oral contraceptives cause a 60% increased risk of HIV infection. [REF. 9]

## Long-Acting Contraceptives

### HIV –

Injectable contraceptives, implants and intrauterine devices (IUDs), such as ParaGard, Mirena, Implanon and Depo-Provera, have also been scientifically shown to increase health risks. The prestigious Lancet Infectious Diseases Journal published a study showing that "biological properties" of injectable contraceptives double the risk of HIV infection in women.

Furthermore, male partners of infected women have a 2x risk of HIV infection than if no contraception was used at all. [REF. 10] These alarming, breakthrough findings appeared on the front page of the New York Times in October 2011.

### Other health risks –

Studies also show that long-acting contraceptives also cause an increased risk of uterine perforation, ovarian cysts, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), possible permanent loss of fertility, ectopic pregnancy, pulmonary emboli, strokes and loss of bone mineral density.

REF. 1. Tanis BC, et al. Oral contraceptives and the risk of myocardial infarction. *New England Journal of Medicine* 2001; 345:1787-93.

REF. 2. Gillum, LA. Ischemic stroke risk with oral contraceptives. *JAMA* July 5 2000;284:72-78.

REF. 3. Kahelnborn C, et al. Oral contraceptive use as a risk factor for premenopausal breast cancer: A meta-analysis. *2006 Mayo Clinic Proc* 2006;81(10):1290-1302

REF. 4. IARC 2007 Monograph 91. Combined estrogen-progestogen contraceptives and combined estrogen-progestin menopausal therapy.

REF. 5. Dolle J, et al. Risk factors for triple negative breast cancer in women under the age of 45. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev* 2009;18(4):1157-65

REF. 6. Cancer Statistics by Cancer Type, Centers for Disease Control. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/dcpc/data/types.htm>

REF. 7. National Cancer Institute: Oral Contraceptives and Cancer Risk (March 21 2012) citing Moreno V, Bosch FX, Munoz N, et al. Effect of oral contraceptives on risk of cervical cancer in women with human papillomavirus infection: the IARC multicentric case-control study. *Lancet* 2002;359(9312):1085-1092.

REF. 8. Francesci S, et al. Genital warts and cervical neoplasia: an epidemiological study. *Br J Cancer* 1983;48:621-28

REF. 9. Wang CC, et al. Risk of HIV infection in oral contraceptive pill users: a meta-analysis *JAIDS* 1999;May 1 21(1):51-58

REF. 10. Hefforn R., et al. Use of hormonal contraceptives and risk of HIV-1 transmission: a prospective cohort study. *Lancet Infect Dis* 2012;12:19-26

REF. 11. See WSFT *amicus curiae* brief footnotes for list of references at <http://p0.vresp.com/pZg1sR>