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The one dollar contraceptive set to make family planning easier

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PATH/PATRICK MCKERN

The new easy-to-use contraceptive device will be available to women in poorer countries for just \$1.

An agreement has been signed which will make contraceptive injections available to women in 69 of the world's poorest countries.

It is an injection - but not as you know it.

The special device, with a smaller needle and no traditional syringe, will be sold at just \$1 a unit.

An agreement - signed in the past few days - will make the new way of giving contraceptive injections available to women in 69 of the world's poorest countries.

The deal has been reached between the Gates Foundation, the drug company Pfizer and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation.

Previously the technology has been used for giving hepatitis B jabs in Indonesia. Burkina Faso was the first country to use it for contraception.



Soré is using contraception for the first time and decides the new device is the best option for her.

Soré Néimatou, 20, has a boyfriend, and is visiting a family planning clinic in the capital Ouagadougou.

"I don't want to get pregnant," she says. "I want to get married first."

She has never used contraception before, and is given a choice of methods. She opts for the new injection - called Sayana Press.

'More acceptable'

The pre-packaged device means there is no need for health workers to prepare a syringe.



The new device's all-in-one design avoids the need to prepare a syringe.

The drug is dispensed by simply squeezing a plastic bubble, giving Soré the protection she wants for three months.

Thanks to the design, which is called Uniject, there is no risk of spillages or dosing errors, and because the device cannot be re-used, it cuts out the risk of infection due to needle-sharing.

The simplicity of the device means health workers can be trained more quickly too - a vital consideration for developing countries.

Kadidia Diallo, the midwife who helped Soré, says the device is more acceptable for women in rural areas.

She said: "Normally for injections you have to put them in someone's bottom, or the top of their leg, but with this - you use the arm.

"That's an advantage for women living in the bush. Many women don't come forward for injections if they have to pull their dresses up - but this is more discreet."

Injectables

In early trials women reported less pain at the injection site than with conventional jabs, too.



Rahimata wants to become an English translator, and is keen to avoid getting pregnant and disrupting her studies.

Six benefits of family planning

1. Preventing pregnancy-related health risks in women

Evidence suggests women who have more than four children have increased maternal mortality risk; avoiding unwanted pregnancies, also reduces the need for unsafe abortions.

2. Reducing infant mortality

Closely spaced and ill-timed births contribute to some of the world's highest infant mortality rates. Infants of mothers who die as a result of giving birth also have a greater risk of death and poor health.

3. Helping to prevent HIV/AIDS

Reducing the risk of unintended pregnancies among women living with HIV means fewer infected babies and orphans. Condoms also protect against STIs including HIV.

4. Empowering people and enhancing education

Informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health gives women enhanced opportunities for education and participation in public life. Children with fewer siblings tend to stay in school longer.

5. Reducing adolescent pregnancies

Pregnant teens are more likely to have preterm or low birth-weight babies, and babies born to adolescents have higher rates of neonatal mortality.

6. Slowing population growth

Unsustainable population growth results in negative impacts on the economy, environment, and national and regional development efforts.

Source: World Health Organization

A lack of contraception in sub-Saharan Africa remains a problem.

Almost a quarter of women of child-bearing age in Burkina Faso would like to plan their families by getting pregnant when they want to. Women there have six children on average.

Although the proportion of women using contraception in Africa has doubled in the past two decades - to 26% - it is much harder to obtain for women who are poor, uneducated or living in a rural area.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 222m women in developing countries would like to delay or stop conception, but are not currently using any form of contraception.

Injectable contraceptives are a widely-used family planning method among women in developing countries, where the lifetime risk for death due to a maternal cause can be as high as one in 15.

The next countries to start using Sayana Press are Niger, Senegal and Uganda.

The launch comes after many years of work at Path, the organisation behind the design of the device - and money from international donors.



Health workers in Niger are being trained how to use Sayana Press.

A Path spokeswoman, Sara Tiff, told BBC News: "Burkina Faso was one of four countries identified for this initial pilot introduction, as an outgrowth of the 2012 Family Planning Summit in London."

The summit was co-hosted by the UK government.

International Development Secretary, Justine Greening, said: "Access to modern, safe and reliable family planning methods is vital.

"Without the ability to choose for themselves when they have children and how many they have, women lose the opportunity to participate fully in their economies and societies."

The makers of Sayana Press hope that one day it could even be used by women to inject themselves with contraception at home.