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Health & wellness

Obama: Religious employers must offer free birth control

By **Deborah Kotz** | GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 20, 2012

The Obama administration announced today that it will require all employers, including religious organizations, to comply with a new mandate in the health law providing free contraception in any health insurance they provide to women without a co-payment.

Religious employers that don't currently offer insurance that covers contraception due to moral objections must comply with the law but will be granted a one-year delay before they must implement the mandate, according to the [Washington Post](#).

Religious institutions that do provide health plans with coverage for contraception, such as Catholic universities and hospitals, must start offering free coverage when the new rule takes effect, writes Post reporter N.C. Aizenman.

This evening, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of the Archdiocese of Boston issued a statement criticized the administration's decision.

"We are distressed to learn that today the Obama administration has decided to leave unchanged a requirement that all healthcare plans — including those offered by Catholic entities — provide sterilization, contraception and some drugs that can cause abortion," the statement said. "Instead, they have decided to merely delay the implementation of enforcing this new rule for one year.

"Cardinal-elect Timothy Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, spoke out very strongly today against this move. I join Cardinal-elect Dolan in expressing deep disappointment at this unprecedented infringement on religious liberty in our country.

“As Cardinal-elect Dolan said, ‘To force American citizens to choose between violating their consciences and forgoing their healthcare is literally unconscionable.’ ”

Starting August 1, any new insurance plans must include free coverage for prescription contraceptives, including plan B or the morning-after pill. Older plans can be grandfathered in and exempted from the free coverage.

Currently in Massachusetts, insurers that provide coverage for prescription medications must also provide the same level of coverage for birth control pills, but there is an exemption for churches and church-controlled organizations.

Here are more details on the [new federal guideline](#).

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