

Improve Health and Save Money: why NHS should offer immediate birth control after birth

Department of Health Policy

In the UK, almost one out of three pregnancies are unplanned, which cost the NHS an estimated £157,461,754 in 2017. When a woman has an accidental pregnancy, there are worse outcomes for both the mother and child. An especially risky time for an unplanned pregnancy is in the year after a woman has given birth since she has higher risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, and even death.

One of the ways to prevent some of these unintended pregnancies is to allow women who have just delivered a baby to have an intrauterine device (IUD) – a type of birth control – placed immediately after birth. An IUD can be used for up to ten years, is more than 99% effective at preventing pregnancy each year (much better than using condoms or the birth control pill), and can be safely placed immediately after delivery of a baby.

We built a model to analyse the costs and effects of placing an IUD immediately after birth as compared to waiting until a follow up appointment with the doctor. We found that the government is estimated to save £17,881,492 over the next five years if women were allowed to get an IUD immediately after birth instead of waiting. We also found that placing an IUD immediately improves the lives of women since it prevents accidental pregnancy. It is time for the NHS to implement this change, since it both improves women's health and presents the opportunity for saving money in a system that is strapped for resources.