

Health law gives pregnant women new options

WASHINGTON (AP) — The health care law has opened up an unusual opportunity for some mothers-to-be to save on medical bills for childbirth.

Lower-income women who signed up for a private policy in the new insurance exchanges will have access to additional coverage from their state's Medicaid program if they get pregnant. Some women could save hundreds of dollars on their share of hospital and doctor bills.

Medicaid already pays for nearly half of U.S. births, but this would create a way for the safety-net program to supplement private insurance for many expectant mothers.

Officials and advocates say the enhanced coverage will be available across the country, whether or not a state expands Medicaid under the health law. However, states have different income cutoffs for eligibility, ranging from near the poverty line to solid middle class.

The main roadblock right now seems to be logistical: reprogramming state and federal computer systems to recognize that certain pregnant women have a legal right to coverage both from Medicaid and private plans on the insurance exchange. Technically, they can pick one or the other, or a combination.

States and insurers will have to sort out who pays for what.

Another big challenge will be educating the public about this latest health law wrinkle. It's complicated for officials and policy experts, let alone the average consumer.

"This is an issue where women are going to have to figure out, 'I'm eligible for both, now how do I do that?'" said Matt Salo, executive director of the National Association of Medicaid Directors, which represents state programs. "This is a great problem to have from the consumer's perspective."

The cost impact for federal and state taxpayers is uncertain. Providing more generous coverage increases costs, but comprehensive prenatal care can save money by preventing premature births and birth defects.

Cynthia Pellegrini, head of the March of Dimes' Washington office, said many women might not have been thinking about maternity benefits when they signed up for coverage under the health law. After all, half of U.S. pregnancies are unplanned. Often consumers just focus on the monthly premium when they select a plan.

The cost of normal uncomplicated childbirth averages \$5,000, said Pellegrini, and preterm births can cost more than 10 times that. Copayments and deductibles add up fast.

Existing Medicaid policies, subsidized private coverage under President Barack Obama's law and an obscure Treasury Department ruling combined to produce the new options for pregnant women.

Before the health law, states offered special, time-limited coverage to uninsured pregnant women until their children were born. That coverage was not only for poor women; some states provide benefits to middle-class women as well.

Then came the Affordable Care Act, with federally subsidized private insurance for people who don't have a health plan on the job. The law, however, drew a line between Medicaid and coverage through the exchanges: If you're eligible for Medicaid you generally can't get government-subsidized private insurance.

That barrier fell away when the Treasury Department ruled that Medicaid's targeted insurance for pregnant women did not meet the definition of "minimum essential coverage" required by the health law.

The ruling last summer opened the possibility for pregnant women to tap both benefit programs, said Dipti Singh, an attorney with the National Health Law Program in Los Angeles.

Many women with low incomes would be better off sticking with Medicaid only because most states have opted to provide comprehensive services for expectant mothers.

But a woman in an exchange plan would be able to limit her cost-sharing and gain access to enhanced maternity benefits if she opted into Medicaid as well. She would not have to worry about her coverage running out after the baby is born, as Medicaid's maternity-only coverage does.

Mental Health Moment

By LINDA J. STOCKTON

The St. Patrick's Day tradition of pinching someone for not wearing green prompted me to think about touch and how it can be both positive and negative.

Touch is a powerful thing. We know that lack of tactile stimulation in infancy can lead to developmental issues like stunted growth as well as emotional disturbances such as personality disorders. Babies deprived of adequate physical and emotional stimulation often die.

Experts say touch has a number of health benefits. It reduces depression, anxiety, stress and physical pain. Touch increases our immune cells. It can be healing.

Like a poker player's tell, touch can give us away.

For example, when a teenage girl touches herself by wrapping her arms around her waist, her self-consciousness is revealed. We can also pick up on deception in others because they often touch their face when spinning their web of lies.

Touch can be extremely harmful and cause pain.

Ask anyone with arthritis and they will tell you an intense handshake can cause them physical pain. A parent or partner who uses their touch to beat another into submission wounds them physically and emotionally. Inappropriate sexual touch is experienced as invasion by the victim.

Touch often communicates love without the use of words. A gentle caress, a celebratory high-five, a hug during a difficult time, the massage of weary feet, kisses and sexual intimacy all convey the message that someone cares about you and desires a connection.

Research shows that happy couples touch a lot.

Research also shows that humans are created with the ability to interpret the touch of other humans. In one study, eight distinct emotions (anger, fear, disgust, love, gratitude, sympathy, happiness and sadness) were communicated by touch only with up to 78 percent accuracy.

The meaning or value of touch is influenced by context. Sexual touch enjoyed within the privacy of the bedroom would likely be extremely uncomfortable if received in public.

Who's doing the touching matters, too. Michael Spezio, a psychologist at Scripps College, says, "The entire experience is affected by your social evaluation of the person touching you."

This is why sexual harassment or sexual abuse by family or friends is so profoundly damaging to its victims.

The benefits of healthy touch are numerous and can improve both physical and emotional health in addition to conveying nonverbal support and communication.

Touch is vital for our well-being. Just remember that touch needs to respect the boundaries of the personal space bubble of self and others.

Stockton is a professional clinical counselor and owner of Inner Peace Counseling, Findlay. If you have a mental health question, please write to: Mental Health Moment, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839.



Stockton

Weekend Doctor

By DR. MIGUEL JORDAN

If running, lifting, coughing, laughing or sneezing causes you to unintentionally and unexpectedly lose small amounts of urine, you may have urinary stress incontinence.

Stress incontinence is especially common in women who have had more than one pregnancy through vaginal delivery. The condition is typically caused by physical changes in the body such as pregnancy and childbirth, menstruation, menopause, surgery, and/or weakened bladder muscles.

If you have this, you're not alone. In fact, the annual direct cost of urinary incontinence in the United States was estimated as \$16.3 billion in 1995.

Urinary stress incontinence can be very uncomfortable and inconvenient. While some women may believe that accidental urine leakage is bound to happen as they get older, the truth is that the problem can be minimized with the right self-help techniques and treatment.

Kegels are pelvic muscle training exercises that can be done at any time.

To do Kegel exercises, squeeze the sphincter muscles as if you are trying to stop the flow of urine. While contracting these muscles, try not to move your legs, buttocks or abdominal muscles.

If you are doing the exercises correctly, no one should be able to tell that you are doing Kegels. Kegel exercises help strengthen the muscles that support the bladder, uterus and bowels, which can help prevent urinary leakage.

In addition to these simple exercises, women can also change certain behaviors that may increase their risk of urinary stress incontinence. Examples include:

- Urinating more frequently to reduce the amount of urinary leakage.
- Avoiding drinking alcohol or caffeinated beverages, which stimulate the bladder.
- Losing weight, if you are overweight.
- Quitting smoking, which can reduce coughing, bladder irritation and the risk of bladder cancer.

Avoiding foods that can irritate the bladder, such as citrus fruits and spicy foods. If you are a woman and you are unable to control urinary stress incontinence with these behavior changes, medication or other procedures may be able to improve symptoms. Treatment options include biofeedback, pessaries and even surgery in some cases.

Biofeedback takes information happening in the body and displays the information in ways that are easy for individuals to understand.

Biofeedback can be effective in treating urinary incontinence by showing women the muscles they are training when they do Kegel exercises.

By placing a few sensors on areas of the lower body and doing Kegel exercises, biofeedback can display a woman's pelvic muscle strength through computer graphs and audible tones. Being able to see, hear and understand the pelvic muscle activity may help individualize and improve a woman's Kegel exercises, which can help prevent urinary leakage.

Medical devices such as pessaries can also help women manage urinary incontinence. A pessary is a small ring or disk that is inserted into the vagina. The device is typically made of silicone or latex and can be worn all day.

A pessary is prescribed, fitted and inserted by a doctor, and helps support the bladder to prevent urinary leakage.

In more severe and long-term cases of urinary incontinence, surgery may be necessary. One surgical option for urinary stress incontinence treatment is a mesh sling procedure.

In this type of surgery, strips of mesh are used to create a sling beneath the neck of the bladder and the urethra, which is the tube that carries urine. This helps keep the urethra closed when women cough, laugh or sneeze.

The Burch procedure, considered the gold standard, is a mesh-free technique and can be done openly or robotically to return support of the urethral vesicle angle, or neck of the bladder.

Both procedures typically have low complication risks and high rates of effectiveness in treating urinary incontinence.

Talk to your doctor about treatment options if you are concerned about female urinary stress incontinence.

Jordan is an obstetrician/gynecologist at Blanchard Valley Women & Children's Center, Findlay. Questions for Blanchard Valley Health System experts may be sent to Weekend Doctor, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839.



Jordan

paid advertisement

FOOT FACTS

By Dr. Thomas F. Vail

Can A Hairline Fracture Affect the Straight-Line Walking Test?

On Mar 19, 2014, Justin Bieber, a Canadian pop musician, dancer, actor, and singer-songwriter discovered by American talent manager Scooter Braun in 2008, claimed that he failed the straight-line walking test because of the hairline fracture on his foot according to the police report after Justin was caught for DUI. He has a July trial date.

Hairline fractures are also considered "stress fractures" by podiatrists. The injury is occurred from repetitive stress or straining on the affected bone. Eventually, ground reactive force becomes very strong and causes a depression or a minute crack on the bone. Sometimes, a stress fracture will not show up on an x-ray when the injury is considered "acute". But typically, 2-6 weeks post injury, an x-ray will show some bone healing indicating there has been a hairline fracture in the area. Hairline fractures can be a result from a sudden fall or from the repetitive motion of sports or even dancing.

What are the symptoms that patients should look out for if suspecting a hairline fracture? Pain and tenderness are noted over the affected area whether with rest or with activities. In order to help the hairline or stress fracture to heal correctly, patients are often advised to refrain from the activities that might aggravate the pain or tenderness for at least 1 month. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID's) such as Ibuprofen, Aleve, naproxen etc. can be taken for pain management. If pain occurs with full weight bearing, crutches and CAM walkers are helpful as well and may be prescribed by your doctor.

It is always recommended that the patient should seek help from a medical professional after this type of injury to ensure he or she gets an appropriate treatment for the condition. If the hairline fracture is minor, a cast might be enough for appropriate bone healing. However, sometimes a surgery will be required to heal the hairline fracture if it's a severe case.

Always remember to listen to your doctor! If you are wearing a cast and walking boot or are to be non-weight-bearing (using crutches or roll-a-bout) do not take them off and put weight on it. It needs time to heal and even if the pain is gone it doesn't mean the fracture has healed completely. The multi-talented star Cher confided recently that she took off her cast for a foot fracture in the late 1990's after only two weeks because it felt better and started dancing on it immediately because she said she had to be in Las Vegas for performances. She regrets to this day that she had not listened to her doctor and done the right thing. She has been dancing on it all these years, but year by year, it's gotten worse and the movie "Burlesque" kind of put it over the edge because she had 16-hour days and unbelievably high heels. She found it hard to even walk because of the scar tissue and had to undergo surgery in late 2013 before her "Dressed to Kill" tour this year.

How can a hairline fracture be diagnosed? As stated previously, if the injury is acute, hairline fractures might not show up on an x-ray until the bone starts healing. However, a bone scan or MRI and detailed history and physical findings can help a doctor to diagnose the hairline fracture.

Think you might have suffered from a hairline fracture? Make an appointment with your foot and ankle specialist who can help take care of your injury appropriately and prevent further complications that might happen in the future.

Dr. Vail is a board certified foot surgeon and on staff at the Blanchard Valley Hospital and the Findlay Surgery Center. He can be reached at the Step Alive Center of Excellence: 1725 Western Ave., Findlay, OH. Most new patients can be seen within 24-48 hours. Call 419-423-1888 to make an appointment or visit us on the web at www.vailfoot.com.



paid advertisement



LIVING LIFE.

GIVING LIFE.

BECAUSE YOU GIVE LIFE, I CAN LIVE LIFE.

Meet Glenn, a cheerful kid who relies on a therapy made from plasma. Thanks to donations from people like you, Glenn can do what he loves most—play.

Receive up to \$250 in May. Schedule an appointment at biolifeplasma.com to help others like Glenn.

  

1789 E Melrose Ave • Findlay, OH 45840 • 419.425.8680

NEW DONORS OR DONORS WHO HAVEN'T DONATED IN SIX MONTHS OR MORE, PRESENT THIS COUPON AND RECEIVE \$100 IN JUST TWO DONATIONS.

Must present this coupon prior to the initial donation to receive a total of \$20 on your first and a total of \$80 on your second successful donation. Initial donation must be completed by 5.31.14 and second donation within 30 days. Coupon redeemable only upon completing successful donations. May not be combined with any other offer. Only at participating locations.

\$100

