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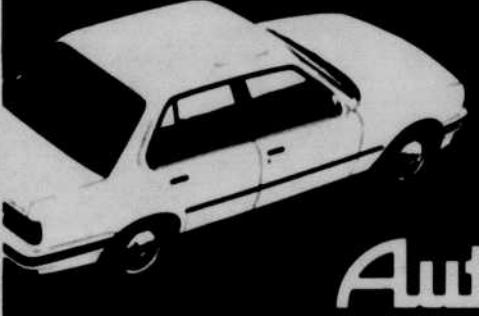
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NATIONAL

Contraceptive will get OK

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new contraceptive is expected to be available in the United States beginning in February, giving women their first major new option in decades, the manufacturer says.

Norplant consists of six match stick-size silicone rubber capsules that are implanted in a minor surgical procedure under the skin of a woman's upper arm. For five years, the capsules release a hormone to prevent pregnancy, but they can be removed — and fertility restored — at any time.

The Food and Drug Administration is expected to approve the contraceptive within days.

"It offers them a new choice which is long-lasting and convenient, uses the lowest dose of hormone that's used in any (hormone-based method) and it doesn't contain estrogen," said C. Wayne Bardin, vice president and director of medical research for the New York-based Population Council.

The council began researching the method in 1966. Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories of Philadelphia will market the contraceptive.

Norplant has been approved in 16 countries. Half a million people in those countries have used Norplant, according to the council's data.

"It's the most effective, reversible method of contraception," with a failure rate of less than 1 percent, said Dr. Samuel A. Pasquale, a principal investigator in the Norplant studies and an associate dean at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Brunswick, N.J.

"Norplant is one of the most significant advances in contraception we've had in the last 30 years," since the birth control pill and intrauterine device became available, Pasquale said.

The major side effect is menstrual irregularities, including spotting between periods and prolonged periods. This causes about 15 percent of women with the implant to have it removed, Bardin said.

Wyeth-Ayerst officials were reluctant to talk about Norplant on Thursday without FDA approval of their product yet.

Company spokeswoman Audrey Ashby said that assuming approval comes shortly, the company expects Norplant to

be available commercially in February. Wyeth-Ayerst plans to train physicians how to implant the capsules, but "there will be some lag time," she said. "Obviously not every physician will be trained to do it" by the time it is available.

Ashby said the price of Norplant was being evaluated but she said it "will be priced significantly below oral contraceptives over five years." Birth control pills cost around \$15 to \$20 per month.

Bardin said he had been told the price would be about \$200 to \$300 for Norplant, which does not include the price of having the implant.

The price worries Lisa Kaeser, a policy analyst for the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a research and education group that deals with reproductive health issues.

"I'm not sure it's going to be available for low-income women," she said. That will depend largely on Wyeth-Ayerst's price of the contraceptive to family planning clinics.

Fake newspaper proclaims war

BINGHAMTON, N.Y. (AP) — A fake edition of the student newspaper carried a headline proclaiming "U.S. Invades Iraq," and caused some panic on campus.

Students and staff at the State University of New York at Binghamton hugged each other and cried. A dining hall worker

whose son is stationed in Saudi Arabia ran screaming from the building. The school's radio station began broadcasting that the United States had gone to war.

One of the headlines announced, "SUNY Binghamton Students Drafted."

But both Page One stories

Wednesday had disclaimers in their last paragraphs on inside pages: "The events described above have not happened. Yet. But they may."

Editors of the real paper, Pipe Dream, said a student group had published the phony issue to make an anti-war statement.

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