Condoms

WHAT ARE CONDOMS?

A condom is a tube made of thin, flexible material that is closed at one end. Condoms have been used for hundreds of years to prevent pregnancy. Most condoms are highly effective in preventing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and certain other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), like gonorrhea and chlamydia. Condoms provide less protection against STIs that can be transmitted through sores or cuts on the skin, like human papillomavirus (HPV), genital herpes (herpes simplex virus or HSV), and syphilis.

Condoms help prevent HIV for higher risk sexual activities like anal or vaginal sex, and for lower risk activities, like oral sex and sharing sex toys. You can buy condoms at many stores or online, and you may often get them for free from clinics or health departments.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN TYPES OF CONDOMS?

There are two main types of condoms: condoms used externally and condoms used internally.

An external condom (sometimes called a male condom or just a condom) is worn over the penis during sex. It is a thin layer of latex, plastic, synthetic rubber, or natural membrane.

- Latex condoms provide the best protection against HIV.
- Plastic (polyurethane) or synthetic rubber condoms are good for people with latex allergies. Note: plastic condoms break more often than latex condoms.
- Natural membrane (such as lambskin) condoms have small holes in them and don't block HIV and other STIs. These should not be used for HIV or STI prevention. **Lambskin condoms do not prevent the spread of HIV.**

An internal condom (sometimes called a female condom) is used in the vagina or anus during sex. It is a thin pouch made of a synthetic latex product called nitrile. HIV can't travel through the nitrile barrier.

HOW ARE CONDOMS USED?

Condoms can protect you during contact between the penis, mouth, vagina, or rectum. Condoms won't protect you from HIV or other infections unless you use them correctly and consistently.

- Store condoms away from heat, cold, or friction. Do not keep them in a wallet or a car glove compartment.
- Check the expiration date. Don't use outdated condoms.
- Don't open a condom package with your teeth. Be careful that your fingernails or jewelry don't tear the condom. Body jewelry in or around the penis or vagina might also tear a condom.
- Use a new condom every time you have sex and when a body part moves from one area to another (for example, switching from anal sex to vaginal sex).
- Check the condom during sex, especially if it feels strange, to make sure it is still in place and unbroken.
- Do not use an internal condom and an external condom at the same time.
- Use only **water-based** lubricants with latex condoms, **not oil-based**. The oils in Crisco, butter, baby oil, Vaseline, or cold cream will make latex fall apart.
- Use unlubricated condoms for oral sex (most lubricants taste awful).
- Do not throw condoms into a toilet. They can clog plumbing.

HOW TO USE AN EXTERNAL CONDOM

To use an external condom:

- Carefully open and remove the condom from the package.
- Place the condom on the tip of the hard penis. If uncircumcised, pull back the foreskin first.
- Pinch the air out of the tip of the condom. While holding the tip, unroll the condom all the way down the penis.
- After sex but before pulling out, hold the base of the condom and carefully pull out the penis.
- Carefully remove the condom and throw it in the trash after using it one time.

If you feel the condom break any time during sex, stop immediately, pull out the penis, take off the broken condom, and put on a new condom.

Use water-based or silicone-based lubricants during sex to help keep the condom from tearing. Don't use oil-based lubricants because they can weaken the condom and cause it to break.

HOW TO USE AN INTERNAL CONDOM

To use an internal condom:

- Carefully open and remove the condom from the package.
- While holding the condom at the closed end, squeeze the sides of the inner ring together and insert it into the vagina or anus.
- Use your finger to push the inner ring up until it rests against the cervix in the vagina or as far into the anus as it can go.
- Be sure the condom is not twisted. The thin, outer ring should remain outside the vagina or anus.
- Guide your partner's penis into the opening of the condom.
- After sex, gently twist the outer ring and pull the condom out.
- Throw the condom in the trash after using it one time.

Stop intercourse if you feel the penis slip between the condom and the walls of the vagina/anus or if the outer ring is pushed into the vagina/anus.

Use lubricant during sex to help keep the condom from slipping or tearing. It is safe to use any type of lubricant with an internal condom.

NONOXYNOL-9

Nonoxynol-9 is a chemical that kills sperm (a spermicide). It can help prevent pregnancy when it is used in the vagina along with condoms or other birth control methods. Nonoxynol-9 should not be used in the mouth or rectum.

Because nonoxynol-9 kills HIV in the test tube, it was thought to prevent HIV infection during sex. Unfortunately, many people are allergic to it. The penis, vagina, and/or rectum can get irritated and develop small sores that actually make it easier for HIV infection to spread. **Nonoxynol-9 should not be used** as a way to prevent HIV infection.

CONDOM MYTHS

“Condoms don’t work:” Studies show condoms are 80-97% effective in preventing HIV transmission if they are used correctly every time you have sex.

“Condoms break a lot:” Less than 2% of condoms break when they are used correctly without oil-based lubricants, doubling up, or using outdated condoms.

“HIV can get through condoms:” HIV cannot get through latex or polyurethane condoms. Don’t use lambskin condoms.

THE BOTTOM LINE

When used correctly and consistently, condoms are the best way to prevent the spread of HIV during sexual activity. Condoms can protect people from HIV-infected bodily fluids. They also reduce the risk of spreading other STIs. Condoms must be stored, used, and disposed of correctly. External condoms are used on the penis. Internal condoms can be used in the vagina or rectum.

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