

STDs and Condoms

Fact Sheet

What do I need to know about STDs and condoms?

The surest ways to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are to abstain from sexual intercourse, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and you know is uninfected.

However, for persons whose sexual behaviors place them at risk for STDs, correct and consistent use of the male latex condom can reduce the risk of STD transmission. While condoms cannot provide absolute protection against STDs, they are the best line of defense for people whose sexual behaviors place them at risk.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states, *“Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are highly effective in preventing transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. In addition, correct and consistent use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including discharge and genital ulcer diseases. While the effect of condoms in preventing human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is unknown, condom use has been associated with a lower rate of cervical cancer, an HPV-associated disease.*”*

What are condoms?

Condoms are a barrier method of contraception that prevent pregnancy by keeping a man’s semen out of a woman’s vagina. Latex condoms also help prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) that are spread by semen, blood, or vaginal secretions, or by contact with infected sores in the genital area. Most condoms go over a man’s penis. A new type of condom was designed to fit into a woman’s vagina. This “female” condom can also be used to protect the anus.

What are condoms made of?

Latex is the most common material used to make condoms today. Viruses such as HIV cannot get through it. However, some people are allergic to latex. Condoms made of polyurethane are a good substitute for persons with latex allergies.

Other condoms are made with lambskin. Because these condoms have tiny holes that are large enough for HIV to get through, **lambskin condoms cannot be used to prevent HIV or other STDs.**

How are condoms used?

Condoms won’t protect you from HIV or other STDs unless you use them correctly. Here are some tips for using condoms:

- Store condoms away from too much 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 Don’t use outdated condoms.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**, or when the penis moves from the anus to the vagina.
- Check the condom during sex, especially if it feels strange, to make sure it is still in place and unbroken.
- Do not use a male condom and a female condom at the same time.
- **Use water-based lubricants with latex condoms, not oil-based lubricants.** The oils in Crisco, butter, baby oil, Vaseline or cold cream will make latex fall apart. Try water-based lubricants such as KY and Astroglide instead.
- Use unlubricated condoms for oral sex.
- Do not flush condoms down the toilet. They can clog plumbing.

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Continued from other side

How to use the male latex condom:

- Be sure to put the condom on before the penis touches the vagina, mouth, or anus. The liquid that comes out of the penis before orgasm (pre-cum) can contain HIV.
- If you want, put some water-based lubricant inside the tip of the condom.
- If you are not circumcised, push your foreskin back before you put on a condom. This lets your foreskin move without breaking the condom.
- Squeeze the air out of the tip of the condom to leave room for semen (cum) and unroll the rest of the condom down the penis.
- Do not “double bag” (use two condoms). Friction between the condoms increases the chance of breakage.
- After orgasm, hold the base of the condom and pull out before your penis gets soft.
- Be careful not to spill semen onto your partner when you throw the condom away.

What about areas of the body not covered by a condom?

Some STDs, such as genital herpes and HPV (human papillomavirus), can occur in both male or female genital areas that are covered by a latex condom, as well as in areas that are not covered. Keep in mind that condoms may not always prevent these STDs because the infection may occur in areas not covered by the condom. While condoms do not provide 100% protection, they are the best available form of protection for people who are sexually active.

Should I use a condom with 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 anus.

Because Nonoxynol-9 kills HIV in the test tube, it was once recommended as a way to prevent HIV infection during sex. Unfortunately, many people are allergic to it. Their sex organs (penis, vagina, and anus) can get irritated and develop small sores that could actually make it easier for HIV and other STDs to spread. Therefore, **Nonoxynol-9 should not be used as a way to prevent HIV or other STDs.**

The bottom line:

Not having sex is still the surest way to avoid becoming infected with an STD. Having sex only with a partner you're sure is uninfected and is only having sex with you is another way of avoiding infection. Otherwise, your best bet is to use a latex condom every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

For more information:

To learn more about HIV and other STDs, or to find out where to get tested in your area, call the **Texas HIV/STD InfoLine** at 1-800-299-2437. This is a free call and you don't have to give your name.

*U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Male Latex Condoms and Sexually Transmitted Diseases,” CDC Fact Sheet for Public Health Personnel (CDC: Atlanta, GA: December 2002), p. 2.

-END (Revised 9/2004)-