CONDOM EFFECTIVENESS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are condoms effective at preventing pregnancy?

Yes. When used consistently and correctly condoms* are 98% effective at preventing pregnancy. This is according to leading health authorities such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).[1,2]

Are condoms effective at preventing sexually transmitted infections?

Yes. Condoms have been proven to provide protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In fact, condoms are the only contraceptive method that also provides STI protection. Condoms provide different levels of risk reduction for different STIs because infections are spread differently—some are spread by contact with bodily fluids while others are spread by skin to skin contact.

In general, research shows that condoms are most effective in preventing those STIs that are spread by bodily fluids, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV. Condoms also can reduce the risk of contracting diseases spread by skin-to-skin contact, such as herpes and HPV. However, condoms only can protect against these diseases if the sores are in areas covered by the condom.[3]

Do condoms provide protection against HIV?

Yes. Long-term studies involving couples where one partner is HIV-positive and the other is not (called serodiscordant couples) allow researchers to estimate the incidence of transmission among condom users and nonusers. Studies of these couples have found that consistent condom use reduces the risk of HIV transmission by between 80 and 94%.[3,4]

Do condoms provide protection against HPV?

Yes. HPV (human papillomavirus) is the virus that causes genital warts and/or cervical cancer. It is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact. Condoms reduce the risk of transmitting HPV if warts are in the area covered by the condom. Recent studies show condom use significantly reduces HPV risk. Condom use has also been shown to reduce the risk of HPV-related health issues, including genital warts, cervical dysplasia, and cervical cancer.[5,6]

Do condoms break and slip off frequently?

No. When used consistently and correctly, condoms are 98% effective in preventing pregnancy and are the only form of birth control that also can prevent STIs.[3,7,8] This is why it's important to follow directions for correct use.

Are condom user errors common?

Yes. Most errors are, in fact, user errors. Some mistakes couples make include placing the condom upside down and then turning it over (29.1%), taking condom off too soon (28.4%), putting the condom on too late (19.7%), opening the package with a sharp object (10%) and using an oil-based lubricant (6.5%). Of course, the most frequent mistake is not using a condom at all.[9]

Are condoms hard to use?

No. Condoms are really easy to put on correctly with just a tiny bit of know-how and a little practice. Check out *A How-to Guide for "Getting it on"* at http://www.factsaboutcondoms.com.

**Where "condom" is referenced, it refers to latex, polyurethane, or polyisoprene male condoms currently marketed in the US, unless otherwise specified.*

Are condoms fragile or delicate?

No. Most condoms are made out of latex, which is a strong and flexible material.[7,10] Condoms undergo rigorous quality control testing at each step of the manufacturing process to ensure that they are intact, strong, stable, and have no holes.[2] Just make sure to store your condoms in a cool dry place (not your wallet). Check out *How Latex Condoms are Made* at http://www.factsaboutcondoms.com.

Can I use lubricants with condoms?

Yes. Many condoms come already lubricated on the outside, inside, or both but you can always add more as long as the lubricant is either water-based or silicone-based. Oil-based lubricants, like baby oil or petroleum jelly, can weaken latex so you should not use these.[7] Always check the instructions for use when choosing a lubricant for use with a condom.

[1] Trussell J. Contraceptive efficacy. In: *Contraceptive Technology*. 19th edition. New York, NY: Ardent Media; 2007.
[2] Kost K, et al. Estimates of contraceptive failure from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Contraception*. 2008;77:10-21.
[3] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Condoms and STDs: Fact Sheet for Public Health Personnel. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/latex.htm.
[4] Weller S, Davis K. Condom effectiveness in reducing heterosexual HIV transmission. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2002:CD003255.
[5] Winer RL, et al. Condom use and the risk of genital human papillomavirus infection in young women. *N Engl J Med*. 2006;354:2645-2654.
[6] Nielson CM, et ak. Consistent condom use is associated with lower prevalence of human papillomavirus infection in men. *J Infect Dis.* 2010;202:445-451.
[7] Warner L and Steiner MJ. Male condoms. In: *Contraceptive Technology.* 19th edition. New York, NY: Ardent Media; 2007.
[8] Finer LB, Henshaw SK. *Perspect Sex Reprod Health*. 2006;38:90-96.
[9] Crosby R, et al. Value of Consistent Condom Use: A Study of Sexually Transmitted Disease Prevention Among African American Adolescent Females. *Am J Public Health*. 2003;93:901-902.
[10] Cates W, Jr. The NIH condom report: the glass is 90% full. *Fam Plann Perspect*. 2001;33:231-233.

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