

Condoms

The most effective ways to prevent HIV transmission through sex are: not having sex (abstinence), staying faithful to one uninfected lifelong partner and consistent condom use. Strategies to provide condoms and promote their use are compatible with promoting abstinence or faithfulness. Using condoms is the smallest behaviour change to make risky sexual behaviour safer. These could be male or female condoms. As a personal strategy to avoid HIV infection, condom use requires people to be highly motivated, always able to access good condoms, to have them available when needed and most important to be able to negotiate condom use with the partner.

Male Condoms

The male condom is made of a very thin rubber, normally latex. It is unrolled over a man's erect penis before penetrative vaginal or anal sex. Some people choose to use a condom for oral sex too. A condom prevents infectious blood, semen or vaginal fluid being passed from one person to another: Using condoms during vaginal and anal penetrative sex prevents infections, including HIV and other STIs. It also prevents conception.

How to use a male condom

The following tips will help to use condoms successfully:

- If the wrapping is ripped or damaged in any way, it should not be used because the condom may be damaged. If the expiry date is past, it should not be used as the latex may have become damaged.
- A new condom has to be used every time for penetrative sex.
- Teeth should not be used to open the wrapping.
- Long nails or jewellery may also damage the condom as it is taken out of its packaging (figure 1).
- Pinch the air out of the tip of the condom before rolling it onto an erect penis, taking care not to rupture the condom. The tip receives the semen (figure 2).

- Roll the condom onto an erect penis before any genital contact with a partner
- For lubrication water based lubricant has to be rubbed on the outside of the condom after it is on the man's penis. Oil based lubricants like vaseline or cooking oils can damage the male condom
- After the men has ejaculated, he holds onto the base of the condom while pulling out, so it doesn't come off while still inside.
- The used condom has to be disposed off safely in a bin. Not in a flush toilet, as the condoms block the toilet.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Femidoms or female condoms

Femidoms are female condoms that can be inserted into the vagina before having penetrative vaginal sex. They are relatively new and available in Pakistan in only a few places. The femidom is made of a type of thin plastic. It is different from latex, which is a rubber. Because it is plastic it can be used with either water based or oil based lubricants. The advantage of female condoms is that women control its use, that they can be inserted long before sex takes place and that they cover part of the genital area – also reducing risk of getting infected with genital warts. Disadvantage is the cost and the fact that

acceptability may be an issue because it is so new.

The femidom is stronger than the male condom and can also be used in anal sex. The risk of rupture is less than with male condoms.

How to use a female condom

- The femidom has an inner and an outer ring. The thin plastic sheath stretches between the rings. The inner ring must be pushed high up into the vagina where it fits snugly over the cervix (figure 3).
- The cervix is the firm, rounded bump at the top of the vagina. The entrance to the womb is in the cervix. The inner ring can be removed, if it feels uncomfortable.
- The outer ring fits snugly over the vaginal lips outside the opening to the vagina. The man's penis can enter through the outer ring into the vagina. Inside, the sheath lines the walls of the vagina. It is important to ensure that the penis doesn't go down the side of the female condom.
- For anal sex, the femidom can be brought into the anus before sex by removing the inner ring and pushing it up. It can also be placed on the erect penis before entering the anus.



Figure 3

Anal sex and condoms

Both male and female condoms can be used for anal sex. However, the female condom is stronger and can be used effectively for anal sex because it is highly lubricated. It is either inserted into the anus or put on the penis first. If used on the penis, the inner ring should be removed first. Inserting the female

condom into the anus may be more difficult than into the vagina. It can be pushed up with the fingers. If female condoms are not available for anal sex, an ordinary condom should be used. Unprotected penetrative anal sex is a very high risk activity for HIV transmission.

What are obstacles and effective responses to promote condom use

1. **Societal, cultural and religious disapproval and non acceptance.**

Stress cultural and social benefits (respect and protection values), include condoms as one among several approaches for HIV and STI prevention, educate about safety and on widespread evidence that condoms do not increase promiscuity.

2. **Lack of awareness, especially among the youth, about HIV, STIs and condom effectiveness: myths, misconceptions and misinformation**

Multiple strategies for information sharing and correcting myths and misinformation, including peer education and behaviour change communication. Teach how to use condoms properly.

3. **Lack of control over condom use**

Promote negotiation skills, particularly for women, sex workers and hijras and work towards greater gender equality in education, work and relationships to build self esteem and social skills.

4. **Lack of availability of condoms: cost, restricted availability, lack of privacy at points of sale or distribution, inadequate promotion**

Social marketing and free government distribution, including distribution through shops, bars, hotels, markets, colleges and prisons. Boxes of condoms in washrooms can avoid embarrassment in obtaining them.

5. **Personal dislike of condoms**

Market condoms in a way that is attractive and trendy and adapted to the target group.