

Position Statement

Condoms and HIV Prevention

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Condom use is a critical element in a comprehensive, effective and sustainable approach to HIV prevention and treatment. Prevention is the mainstay of the response to AIDS. Condoms are an integral and essential part of comprehensive prevention and care programs, and their promotion must be accelerated. In 2007, an estimated 2.7 million people became newly infected with HIV. About 45% of them were young people from 15 to 24 years old, with young girls at greater risk of infection than boys.

The male latex condom is the single, most efficient, available technology to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The search for new preventive technologies such as HIV vaccines and microbicides continues to make progress, but condoms will remain the key preventive tool for many, many years to come. Condoms are a key component of combination prevention strategies individuals can choose at different times in their lives to reduce their risks of sexual exposure to HIV.

To ensure safety and efficacy, condoms must be manufactured to the highest international standards. They must be procured according to the quality assurance procedures established by the WHO, UNFPA and UNAIDS and they should be stored away from direct heat sources. Prevention programs need to ensure that high-quality condoms are accessible to those who need them, when they need them, and that people have the knowledge and skills to use them correctly. Condoms must be readily available universally, either free or at low cost, and promoted in ways that help overcome social and personal obstacles to their use. Condom use is more likely when people can access them at no cost or at greatly subsidized prices.

Effective condom promotion targets not only the general population, but also people at higher risk of HIV exposure, especially women, young people, sex workers and their clients, injecting drug users and men who have sex with men. UNFPA estimates that the current supply of condoms in low- and middle-income countries falls well short of the number required (the condom 'gap').

Despite the gap, international funding for condom procurement has not increased in recent years. Collective actions at all levels are needed to support efforts of countries, especially those that depend on external assistance for condom procurement, promotion and distribution.

Young girls and women are regularly and repeatedly denied information about, and access to, condoms. Often they do not have the power to negotiate the use of condoms. In many social contexts, men are resistant to the use of condoms. This needs to be recognized in designing condom promotion programs. Female condoms can provide women with more control in protecting themselves. However, women will remain highly vulnerable to HIV exposure, until men and women share equal decision-making powers in their interpersonal relationships.

Promotion of correct and consistent condom use within antiretroviral treatment programs, and within reproductive health and family planning services, is essential to reduce further opportunities for HIV transmission. Rapid scale-up of HIV testing and counselling is needed to meet the prevention needs of all people, whether they are HIV-positive or negative.

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