Condoms & lubricants fact sheet

Condoms and lubricants help to prevent HIV infection.

Find out how to use them consistently and correctly.

What is a condom?

A condom is a thin piece of material that fits over a man’s penis (male condom) or inside a woman’s vagina (female condom) during sex. When used correctly, condoms prevent HIV, as well as pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

How do condoms work?

Sexual fluids such as semen, vaginal fluids and blood can transmit HIV and STIs. A condom forms a barrier between bodily fluids and entry points for HIV, such as:

- vagina
- anus
- penis (urethra)
- mouth (only if there are large open sores or bleeding gums).

When should I use a condom?

Using a condom stops HIV:

- before any penetrative sexual activities
- during vaginal, anal and oral sex
- every time you have sex
- on shared sex toys. Put a new condom on for each partner.

Condom types

There are two main types of condom.

- The male condom is the most common type of condom. It fits around the penis.
- The female condom is wider than the male condom, it fits inside the vagina or anus.

See our ‘How to use a female condom’ infographic for information about using a female condom.
A dental dam is a sheet of latex that can be used for protection during oral sex. Or, try a flavoured condom cut open!

**Condom shapes and sizes**

Male condoms come in various shapes and sizes ... 

- standard condoms have straight sides
- fitted condoms are indented below the head of the penis
- large condoms are longer and wider giving more room
- some condoms are wider over the head of the penis
- extra strong condoms are thicker - important for anal sex
- textured condoms, with ribs or bumps, can increase sensation for both partners
- coloured or flavoured condoms can make oral sex more enjoyable.

**Using lubricants**

Lubricant (or lube) is a water, silicone or oil-based substance. Never use oil-based lubricants (e.g. massage oils or Vaseline) with latex condoms – they can break. Many condoms are covered in some lubricant.

Use extra lubricant...

- to make using condoms more comfortable and fun
- to reduce the risk of a condom breaking, especially during anal sex
- on the outside of male and female condoms
- inside and around the vagina or anus.

Stimulating (e.g. warms or tingles) and flavoured lubricants are available in some places.

**Condom and lubricant tips**

You can get condoms and lubricant from...

- your doctor or healthcare provider
- a sexual health or government clinic
- stores and pharmacies
- online.

Some charities, healthcare clinics or gay bars provide free condoms.

If the condom breaks during sex...

- withdraw the penis immediately and use a new condom
- access emergency contraception if not using other contraceptive methods
- both partners should be tested for HIV and STIs
- access emergency HIV treatment if you are at risk of HIV infection.
Allergic to latex condoms..?

Not all condoms are made of latex. Polyurethane or polyisoprene condoms are also available.³

**Condom effectiveness**

Condoms are very effective at protecting against HIV, other STIs and pregnancy.⁴

Remember...

- use a new condom every time you have sex
- always use extra water-based lubricant during anal sex
- use certified condoms E.g. FDA, CE, ISO, Kitemark
- some STIs are transmitted by skin-to-skin contact - condoms cannot protect you from these.

**Know your rights**

You have the right to:

- insist on using a condom
- refuse sex without a condom
- use a new condom over shared sex toys.

1. NAM (accessed February 2016) 'Female condoms for anal sex'
2. NAM (2015) 'Condoms'
3. NHS Choices (2015) 'Male condoms'
4. NAM (accessed February 2016) 'Types of condoms'

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