



MYTHS, MISPERCEPTIONS AND FEARS

ADDRESSING
CONDOM USE
BARRIERS



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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ASTM	American Society for Testing and Materials
CDC	Centers for Disease Control (USA)
CEN	Comite Europeen de Normalisation
CQI	Condom Quality Index
FHI	Family Health International
IATT	Inter-Agency Task Team for Condom Programming composed of IPPF, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS, the World Bank and WHO
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
N-9	Nonoxynol-9
NIH	National Institutes of Health (USA)
PATH	Program for Appropriate Technology in Health
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
WHO	World Health Organization
WPRO	Western Pacific Regional Office



INTRODUCTION

This document has been developed to address commonly held condom myths, misperceptions, fears and negative attitudes (MMFs) that act as barriers to correct and consistent condom use around the world.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO) Department of Reproductive Health and Research and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) collected these myths and misperceptions from regional and country programme managers and health care providers. The most commonly occurring myths and misperceptions are addressed in this document.

For every fact that is known about condoms, there are as many myths and misperceptions. This booklet offers evidence-based factual information about condoms and their use. WHO, UNAIDS, and UNFPA stated, in a position paper “Condoms and HIV Prevention” issued July 2004, that the male latex condom is the single most efficient and most available technology to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV and other STIs. A few direct references are provided throughout the text while a selected bibliography from this review is presented at the end of Section II for your expanded study into condoms and condom use.

There is a high awareness of HIV/AIDS in most major urban areas around the globe. Its basic transmission and prevention methods are also widely known. Condoms, when used correctly during every sexual penetration, have been proven to be an effective measure against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV¹. Despite these known facts, many myths and misperceptions about condoms contribute to their inconsistent use, and therefore diminish their impact on the prevention of HIV.

¹KK Holmes, et al Effectiveness of condoms in preventing sexually transmitted infections, *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, June 2004, 82 (6)



Introduction

Low condom use is sometimes attributed to unreliable supply and poor distribution to those who need condoms the most. It is reported that condom use among populations at high risk of acquiring HIV/STIs has increased, but despite increased acceptability, condom availability in many countries remains low².

An estimated 8 to 10 billion condoms are currently used in low and middle-income countries; however, this represents only half of the condoms needed every year to protect the world's population from HIV and other STIs.

There are also other barriers to consistent and correct use of condoms. For some people, it is simply something that has not been part of their past set of behaviours (culture), and starting something new is their greatest hurdle. Others may have been influenced by misinformation or commonly held myths and misperceptions, which generate dismissive or negative views of condoms and/or condom use. Still others may be influenced by strong religious views or teachings or social inequities which prohibit discussing or negotiating safer sexual practices.

National authorities and development agencies can help prevent unintended pregnancy and the transmission of HIV/STIs by providing condoms free of charge or at affordable prices.

These facts about condoms and approaches to condom use are to help individuals involved in reproductive health, particularly family planning and HIV/STI prevention and care programmes. The accurate evidence-based information should help provide convincing arguments to motivate individuals to adopt safe sexual practices and to consistently and correctly use condoms to prevent unintended pregnancy and the transmission of HIV/STIs.

They can also support strategies that help make them acceptable and accessible to those in greatest need of their protective benefits.

This includes:

- Increasing supplies of quality assured male and female condoms.
- Increasing the type and number of distribution points.
- Promoting *dual protection*, which is the practice of using condoms for both family planning purposes as well as the prevention of STIs.³
- Promoting both male and female condoms, and
- Addressing attitudes and misunderstandings brought on by MMFs that threaten correct and consistent condom use.

Everyone who cares about the well-being of their community should take whatever action available to them to address misinformation, myth and misperception that hinder the prevention of HIV/STIs. With accurate information, individuals can make an informed choice about the use of condoms and safer sexual practices.

Much of the information presented here will be repeated in multiple ways, in varying contexts, with the hope that readers will find at least one presentation that is easy for them to understand and strongly connect with.

³UNFPA. 2002 Programming for Prevention in Various Stages of an HIV/AIDS Epidemic. HIV Prevention Now: Programme Briefs. No. 8 New York: UNFPA



PURPOSE

The purpose of this publication is to provide factual information that can be used to foster a positive attitude towards condom use. Its focus is on the individual's responsibility to themselves and their families and respect for the well-being of others.

The text concentrates on providing accurate evidence-based information to support the fact that consistent use of male or female condoms is highly effective at preventing unintended pregnancy, the transmission of HIV and other STIs. It acknowledges, but does not go into detail that male and female condom promotion should be a component of a comprehensive prevention programme that also promotes abstinence, being faithful (mutual monogamy), safe sexual practices, delayed onset of sexual initiation, non-penetrative safer sexual practices, and woman's empowerment. The messages will be kept simple and focused on responding to common, reoccurring myths, misperceptions, and fears (MMF) related to condoms and condom use.

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