

An aerial, top-down view of a diverse crowd of people walking on a teal-colored floor with a white grid pattern. The people are seen from above, casting long shadows. The crowd includes individuals of various ages, ethnicities, and abilities, such as a person in a wheelchair and a person pushing a stroller. The overall scene conveys a sense of a busy, inclusive public space.

AIDS

and other sexually transmitted diseases can be prevented



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de Salut

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Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases can be prevented

The purpose of this information is to help you to understand how using condoms can help reduce the spread of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as gonorrhoea, genital infection caused by Chlamydia, hepatitis B, genital herpes and syphilis.

These infections are transmitted through sexual relations involving penetration, whether vaginal, anal or oral. The virus that causes Aids (Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV) can also be transmitted by people sharing needles to inject drugs. Finally, a pregnant woman may transmit the virus to her child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.

Infection with HIV or other STDs can cause:

- Ectopic pregnancies, which endanger the mother's life. Ectopic pregnancies never develop into live births.
- Infertility and sterility
- Genital, anal or other cancers
- Death

The safest ways to avoid infection from these diseases are sexual abstinence and sexual relations based on mutual trust with a single, non-infected partner. There are also forms of sexual relations that do not entail the risk of infection: kissing, hugging, caressing, etc. However, by using condoms correctly, people not in any of these situations who have sexual relations can reduce the risk of transmitting these diseases, even Aids. It is particularly important to prevent the spread of Aids, as there is, as yet, no cure for the disease.

Experts believe that most people who have been infected with Aids through sexual relations could have avoided contracting the disease by using a condom correctly.

This booklet provides the answers to ten important questions about condoms.

Who should use a condom?

Anyone who has sexual relations with penetration (anal, vaginal or oral) and who does not know whether they themselves or their partner are infected with HIV or other STDs. It is also dangerous to have unprotected sex with anyone who has shared needles to inject drugs. That is why it is always advisable to use a condom properly.

Women can also protect themselves against infection by using the female condom. A female condom is a sheath made of polyurethane (stronger than latex and less likely to cause allergic reactions) and is considered as safe or safer than the male condom. If you find yourself in one of the above situations and your partner does not want to use a condom, you are advised not to have sexual relations involving penetration with him or her.



2 How do condoms protect against Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases?

The condom acts as a barrier that prevents the virus that causes Aids and other microbes that cause sexually transmitted diseases from passing to the other person through the blood, the semen or vaginal fluids.

The female condom also has the additional advantage that it covers a large area of the female genitals, further decreasing the risk of infection.



3 What should we remember before using a condom?

Only use condoms whose packaging states the following:

- That they are made of latex (male condoms, though condoms made of polyurethane are also available for people allergic to latex) or polyurethane (female condoms). Laboratory studies have shown that these materials prevent the transmission of the viruses that cause Aids, hepatitis B and simple herpes, cytomegalovirus and the Chlamydia and Gonococcal bacteria.
- That they meet EU standards (according to European Community legislation).
- The expiry date or date of manufacture.

Properly stored, condoms have a life of five years. Condoms treated with spermicide expire after two years. Do not buy or use condoms that are past their expiry date.

- That they have a nipple-shaped tip or reservoir at the end to hold semen and prevent it from leaking out after ejaculation.

For the best protection, the condom should cover the whole penis. The condoms found on the market in this country are similar to those available in most European Community countries. Thicker, stronger condoms (for anal penetration) and flavoured condoms (for oral-genital penetration) are also available.

Never use condoms that are not in good condition (if they are sticky, for example) or past their expiry date.

4 How is the quality of condoms guaranteed?

In Catalonia, condoms must comply with EC standards, which the Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs has adopted as compulsory for all health products since June 1998.

These regulations establish test methods and specifications or minimum quality standards that all condoms must comply with in order to be considered suitable for use.



5 How can you be sure of maximum protection?

The degree of protection that condoms can provide depends not only on their quality, but also, to a large extent, how we store, handle and use them.

Always use a new condom for every sexual relation with penetration.

Always keep condoms in a fresh, dry place, away from direct sunlight.

Be careful not to damage the condom when you take it out of the package, and not to break it with the fingernails or rings whilst handling it. If the material is sticky, the condom is not in good condition. When using a male condom, check that there are no visible defects (rips and tears or holes) on the tip after putting it on.

Do not unroll it to check for these defects, as this could damage the condom. Never use damaged condoms or condoms past their expiry date.

Never use a male and female condom at the same time, as the friction between the two could damage them.

Moderate drug or alcohol use, as this could affect your ability to use the condom correctly.

6 Should lubricants be used with condoms?

Lubricants are products used to soften the condom and help prevent ripping or tearing due to the friction that occurs during sexual relations with penetration.

Some latex condoms are already treated with a little silicon oil, which does not harm the quality of the latex.

If you buy unlubricated condoms, it is advisable to use a water based and water soluble lubricant such as glycerine. These products can be bought at chemists shops.

Never use a greasy lubricant that contains paraffin, lanolin or vaseline oil (baby oils, lotions or beauty creams) as laboratory tests show that these products reduce the resistance of the latex, making it break more easily.

In the case of anal penetration, it is important to lubricate the condom using water-soluble creams such as glycerine, as the condom can break more easily during this type of relation.

If you are not sure what condom or lubricant to use, your chemist will inform and advise you.

7

Is it necessary to use a spermicide with condoms?

Spermicides, in the form of vaginal suppositories, gels or a treatment already applied to condoms when you buy them, are chemical products that provide additional protection against pregnancy, as well as acting as lubricants.

Spermicides have only been shown to be effective in the laboratory, and there is no proof that they protect against HIV. They should therefore never be used instead of a condom.

However, spermicides can cause irritation and vaginal, genital and rectal sores in some people, increasing the risk of transmitting or becoming infected with STD.

Spermicide condoms expire before those not treated with spermicide. Never buy or use condoms after their expiry date.



8 Where to get condoms

In our country, you can buy condoms at chemists shops, at some supermarkets and service stations, at sex shops and from vending machines in bars, cinemas, discotheques and other places frequented by young people.

In Catalonia, condoms are available free from sex and family guidance clinics, some “CAP” primary attention centres, drug clinics, youth information services and associations providing Aids-related services.

You can also buy condoms at lower prices from vending machines in some municipal buildings, university centres and public transport facilities (RENFE, TMB, FGC) under the “I tu, ja el portes?” (“And you, do you wear one?”) campaign.

Travelling sales of condoms are forbidden by law. Nonetheless, wherever you buy condoms, always check to make sure that they have not expired and that they carry the European Standards mark CE.

9 How to keep condoms

You should always keep condoms in a fresh, dry place out of direct sunlight.

Never keep them in your trouser pockets or in your car glove compartment for many hours, as the heat can quickly damage them, making it easier for them to break during use.



10 How to use a condom

You should use a condom for any sexual relation, whether vaginal, anal or oral. Follow these instructions:

When using a male condom:

- Place the condom over the erect penis, covering it completely and pinching the tip to leave a space for the semen to collect and prevent it from leaking out after ejaculation.
- Pull out before the penis softens, holding the condom against the base of the penis while doing so. Dispose of used condoms in the waste bin. Never flush condoms down the toilet.

When using a female condom:

- For vaginal sex, squeeze the smaller ring and insert it into the vagina as far as possible.
- Insert finger into the condom to touch the end of the inner ring and push it down into the vagina.
- To remove, twist the large outer ring to avoid semen leakage and pull condom out gently. Dispose of condom in waste bin.

Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases can be prevented

Inform yourself and protect yourself and others. If you use a condom correctly, you will greatly reduce the risk of transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

If you need more information or have any questions about your situation, ask your doctor or at an STD clinic. You can also phone the free helpline provided by the Health Department's Aids Prevention and Care Programme, where qualified professionals will advise you in complete confidentiality.

Ring this number:
900 21 22 22



AIDS

900 212222

Free and confidential advice



Sanitat Respon 24 hores

902 111 444



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