

AIDS: Is the Condom the Answer?

There has been no doubt that most industrialized countries in the world have recognized and endorsed the efficacy of condoms in preventing the transmission of most sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). However, the debate still remains on the use of this prophylactic in addressing the issue of AIDS prevention.

Despite numerous scientific studies affirming the capability of latex condoms in preventing the transfer of the HIV virus from an infected person to his or her uninfected sexual partner, many organizations the world over still question its efficacy in AIDS prevention. There have been rigorous anti-condom campaigns launched by various groups and organizations, each with different motives for their actions. Some groups have been adamant in condemning condoms as a means of promoting sexual promiscuity in the general population, and links this contraceptive device with the proliferation of AIDS.

To combat what it perceives as an immoral practice, some organizations have long advocated abstinence before marriage and marital fidelity as an effective means of AIDS prevention. Recently, as an example, its proponents had zeroed in on one African country: Uganda. Before the implementation of a rigorous AIDS prevention campaign, Uganda has one of the highest AIDS prevalence rate in the region. After almost a decade of putting the campaign in place, the infection rate dropped from 15% to just about 5%. Anti-condom groups argued that the program was effective because it emphasizes more on abstinence and the reduction of sexual partners. They established a comparison with neighboring countries like Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa, which they said promoted on using condoms alone in AIDS prevention and still maintains a high HIV prevalence and incidence rates.

So, does this mean that condoms are quite ineffective in preventing the spread of HIV and consequently, fails in AIDS prevention?

Actually, no. To completely disregard the efficacy of condoms against AIDS would be quite irresponsible. Though no condom manufacturer can claim that their products can totally prevent a user from contacting AIDS and other STDs, condoms do dramatically minimize the risk against these diseases when used correctly. What most conservatives try to downplay is the fact that the Ugandan government have tried a three-pronged approach in their AIDS prevention campaign. Indeed, abstinence before marriage was a focus of the campaign, but it also emphasized being faithful to only one sexual partner, and finally, the use of condoms, specifically latex condoms.

As in anywhere else in the world, the only foolproof way of preventing yourself from getting any form of STD would be complete abstinence. A little bit down the hierarchy would be to have sex only with a single partner proven to be disease-free. However, in societies where people are free to live the lifestyles they most prefer, to emphasize solely these two approaches is not practical. In modern society where personal choice would always be prevalent over any moral or religious dictates, condoms do offer a choice. All in all, the worldwide efforts in AIDS prevention is accomplished not just by the promotion of a single practice or belief, but rather from the combined efforts of increasing awareness on this disease, its prevalence and risks, the promotion of safer sex, encouraging the maintenance of healthy, monogamous relationships, and the availability of protective devices such as male and female condoms.

So the next time someone starts discrediting condoms in AIDS prevention, ask them to think again and look for reputable studies that proved time and again that this contraceptive still does its share in protecting public health.

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About the Author

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