

Are Condoms Foolproof, or for Fools?

While using a condom, you can still become pregnant. Condoms have an annual contraceptive failure rate of 18.4 percent for girls under age 18 (1). And among young, unmarried, minority women the annual failure rate is 36.3 percent; among unmarried Hispanic women it is as high as 44.5 percent (2).

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Condoms provide even less protection against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) than they do against pregnancy. That's because a woman can get pregnant only at ovulation time (two to three days each month), but a sexually transmitted disease can pass from partner to partner at any time of the month. Venereal diseases frequently spread through "skin to skin" contact even when condoms are used. This can happen because the bacterial or viral germs that cause many serious STDs (such as human papilloma virus, chlamydia, herpes and syphilis) do not infect just one place on your body. They may infect anywhere in the male or female genital areas. So even if the virus or bacteria doesn't get through the condom itself, you can still get a disease, because condoms don't cover all the areas necessary to prevent infection during sexual contact.

Health Experts Say...

Many leading health experts warn that you should not depend on condoms for protection against AIDS and other STDs: "Simply put, condoms fail. And condoms fail at a rate unacceptable for me as a physician to endorse them as a strategy to be promoted as a meaningful AIDS protection." -- Dr. Robert Renfield, chief of retro-viral research, Walter Reed Army Institute (3). "Saying that the use of condoms is 'safe sex' is in fact playing Russian roulette. A lot of people will die in this dangerous game." -- Dr. Teresa Crenshaw, member of the U.S. Presidential AIDS Commission and past president of the American Association of Sex Educators (4).

Condoms aren't safe. In 1993, Dr. Susan Weller of the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston reported that an analysis of data from 11 separate studies showed condoms had an average failure rate of 31 percent in protecting against HIV. Dr. Weller reports that "since contraceptive research indicates condoms are about 90 percent effective in preventing pregnancy, many people, even physicians, assume condoms prevent HIV transmission with the same degree of effectiveness. However, HIV transmission studies do not show this to be true." Dr. Weller continues, saying "new data indicate some condoms, even latex ones, may leak HIV."

One in Every Three College Women is Infected

HPV: Major Cause of Cancer

The New England Journal of Medicine (April 18, 1996) reported that approximately one in every three female college students in America is infected with a venereal disease called Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). The medical Institute for Sexual Health (April 1994) reported that the greatest danger of HPV is that it is the probable cause of almost all cervical cancer. Based on statistics provided by the American Cancer Society, it is estimated that in 1994 there were 16,000 new cases of cervical cancer and 5,000 related deaths in the United States. HPV also causes genital warts on both men and women that range in size from a small tick to the size of a cauliflower. These warts can be very difficult to cure, and sometimes require surgery. Dr. Stephen Curry of the New England Medical Center in Boston was quoted in Time magazine as saying "This virus (HPV) is rampant. If it were not for AIDS, stories about it would be on the front page of every newspaper."

Are Condoms Really Safe?

Fact: Latex condoms have tiny intrinsic holes called "voids." The AIDS virus is 50 times smaller than these tiny holes which makes it easy for the virus to pass through them (5), about as easy as a dime passing through a basketball hoop. Conclusion: Telling somebody to put a mere balloon between their health and a deadly disease is irresponsible. It's like telling someone it's okay to drink and drive as long as they wear a seat belt.

STD Epidemic

"I'm infected with what?" Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are spreading like wildfire. Doctors are calling it an epidemic. One in every four teenagers will be infected with an STD before they graduate from high school. Each

day 33,000 Americans become infected with an STD. 22,000 of these new STD infections are contracted by 15 to 25-year olds. In 1980, four million people were reported to have been infected with an STD. By 1990 that number tripled with 12 million people reported to have a new STD infection that year. Today, one in every five Americans between ages 15 and 55 is infected with at least one sexually transmitted disease. The Centers for Disease Control reports that there are now more than 50 known STDs. Some STDs can make you sterile. Some are incurable (6).

People with STDs often look healthy. Don't be deceived. They can give you diseases that can make you miserable. Some of the diseases are itchy, burning, painful and even deadly. Most teenagers have been lead to believe that a condom will protect them from STDs. The truth is much different. Having sex with condoms is like playing with fire. It doesn't make it safe. Many people using condoms still get STDs. It's an epidemic that's infected more than 50 million Americans. Are you willing to risk a lifetime of good health for a few moments of pleasure?

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Footnotes

(1) "*Contraceptive Failure Rate in the U.S.: Estimates from the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth*," M.D. Hayward and J. Yogi, *Family Planning Perspectives*, Sept/Oct. 1986, p. 204.

(2) "*Contraceptive Failure Rate in the U.S.: Revis3ed Estimates From the 1982 Natl. Survey of Family Growth*," E.F. Jones and J.D. Forrest, *Family Planning Perspectives*, May/June 1989, p. 103.

(3) "*Condom 'Cure' Questioned by top AIDS researcher*," Russell Shaw, *Our Sunday Visitor*, 1/23/94.

(4) "*Condoms: Experts Fear False Sense of Security*," *The New York Times*, 8/18/87.

(5) Dr. C.M. Roland, Editor of *Rubber Chemistry and Technology*, Letter to the Editor, *The Washington Times*, 4/22/92.

(6) Sources for STD statistics: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, New York and the Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta.

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