

Q&A - Condom Use

● Do latex condoms work to protect me from STDs and pregnancy?

YES. Latex condoms block the smallest organisms as well as large particles like sperm. They help to prevent most major STDs. A few STDs, such as herpes, human papilloma virus (HPV), and syphilis, can sometimes infect places on the body not protected by condoms. If you or your partner notice sores in the genital area, you should not have sex. Call your doctor or health care provider for an exam immediately.

● Am I at risk of getting HIV/AIDS?

Young people are especially at risk! About 1/2 of all new HIV infections happen to people under the age of 25. Studies show that about 1/3 of all people with HIV/AIDS haven't even been tested – so your partner may not even know that they have it.

● Do I need to use a condom for anal sex?

YES. The skin in the anal passage is very fragile and can tear. STDs can be easily spread through anal sex. In fact, anal sex is the riskiest form of sex for getting HIV/AIDS.

Condoms can protect you during anal sex. Use of a condom other than for vaginal intercourse can increase the potential for damage to the condom. Using a water-based lubricant will help reduce the risk of a latex condom breaking. **However—a condom with spermicidal lubricant should not be used during anal sex.**

● How should I store condoms?

Keep your condoms in a cool, dry place. Storing them near heat (in your glove compartment or your wallet) can cause them to become brittle or gummy and not be any good to use.

● How can I tell if a condom is damaged?

Damaged packaging is one way to tell. Another is to look at the condom and feel it before you put it on. You can also check it when it is on the erect penis. A condom that sticks to itself, is gummy or brittle, isn't the same color all over, or has tears or holes shouldn't be used. Unrolling the condom or filling it with air or water to check it can also damage the condom.

● Should condoms be used for oral sex?

YES. Many people mistakenly believe oral sex is a way to practice safe sex...it's not. STDs can be spread during oral sex. To be safe, you should use a condom if the penis is going to touch the mouth. Be sure to use a condom that's labeled "effective against STDs."

If your mouth touches the outside or inside of your partner's vagina (cunnilingus) or anus (anilingus), you can reduce your risk of getting an STD by placing a barrier (sometimes called a "Dental Dam") over the vagina or anus. Use of a condom other than for vaginal intercourse can increase the potential for damage to the condom.