

## FEMALE CONDOMS: A TOOL FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

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Female condoms are currently the only available prevention method that provides effective protection against both STI/HIV transmission and unintended pregnancy and that are designed for women to initiate. They are also an important method of protection for people of all genders who engage in receptive vaginal or anal sex, giving them more agency over their sexual health. They should be a standard option in an array of available methods for contraception and STI/HIV prevention to meet women's diverse needs and preferences.

### FEMALE CONDOMS ARE EFFECTIVE AND ACCEPTED

- There are several types of female condoms currently available. Among these types is the FC2, made of nitrile (a synthetic latex) and held in place by a plastic ring. The FC2 has been distributed in 144 countries since its introduction in 2007 and is currently the only U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved female condom.
- Studies have shown that the female condom is at least as effective as the male condom in reducing the risk of contracting STIs, and can reduce the per-act probability of HIV transmission by more than 90 percent.
- Female condoms are also effective at preventing pregnancies, with prevention rates comparable to male condoms.
- Studies have shown that female condoms, when promoted and distributed alongside male condoms, can increase the number of protected sex acts.
- Studies have shown positive responses to female condoms from women and men of various ages, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and geographic location.

### FEMALE CONDOMS ARE AN IMPORTANT SRHR TOOL FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

- The United Nations Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children lists female condoms as an under-utilized but highly effective tool to improve reproductive health outcomes and save women's lives.
- Because they lead to more protected sex acts, widespread availability of female condoms as part of the mix of available prevention methods can lead to broad economic and social benefits.
- The knowledge and skills gained through learning about female condoms and how to use them can lead to greater empowerment and autonomy for women.
- Because female condoms are designed for women to initiate, and can even be inserted well in advance of intercourse, they can be a critically important option for women who cannot always safely negotiate male condom use, including women at risk of intimate partner violence and sex workers who may face condom refusal or violence from clients.
- Female condoms are a non-hormonal contraceptive method and therefore an important option for women who cannot, or prefer not to, use hormonal methods to prevent pregnancy.
- Female condoms can be an important tool for women living with HIV to protect their health, plan their families, and pursue their right to a safe and pleasurable sex life.
- For many couples, female condoms can be a more pleasurable safer sex option. Inner or outer rings can provide extra stimulation, and the heat-transmitting properties of materials used in non-latex female condoms can increase pleasure. Female condoms are not dependent on an erection and can be inserted hours before intercourse or be used as part of foreplay.

## U.S. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND FEMALE CONDOMS

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### THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS A LEADER IN SUPPORTING FEMALE CONDOMS

- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is one of the largest purchasers of female condoms globally. In 2014, USAID procured about 11 million female condoms, investing about \$6.9 billion in female condom commodities.
- USAID has highlighted the need for comprehensive female condom programming and promotion in order to promote the use of this “untapped resource” as a safe and effective HIV prevention intervention.
- The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the U.S. government’s global HIV/AIDS program, explicitly mentions both male and female condoms and their importance as prevention methods for women and men. In 2013, PEPFAR released an updated Gender Strategy that highlights the critical importance of woman-centered HIV prevention and explicitly recommends expanding access to woman-initiated methods such as female condoms.
- PEPFAR Country Operating Plan guidance also explicitly mentions female condoms. PEPFAR's Technical Considerations guidance, provided by PEPFAR technical working groups, includes further detail on male and female condom programming, specifically highlighting female condom promotion as a key component of an overall condom strategy.
- Announced in 2014, the DREAMS Initiative is an ambitious new partnership between PEPFAR, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Girl Effect aiming to dramatically reduce the number of new HIV infections in adolescent girls and young women in ten countries in sub-Saharan Africa through comprehensive and evidence-based interventions. DREAMS guidance highlights male and female condom promotion as a core intervention that will empower girls and young women and reduce their risk.

### WHAT THE U.S. CAN DO TO STRENGTHEN ITS SUPPORT FOR FEMALE CONDOMS

It is not enough that female condoms exist in a given country or community. People, especially those at risk of HIV or unintended pregnancy, must know where to access female condoms and have the skills and knowledge to use them consistently and correctly. There is a need for increased U.S. support for comprehensive programming of female condoms in family planning and HIV/AIDS programs.

- Comprehensive female condom programming includes activities like social marketing strategies to encourage behavior change, capacity building and training, and community outreach. It can involve teaching men and women not only how to use female condoms, but how to negotiate condom use and talk about sexuality.
- Effective family planning and HIV programs that include female condoms also monitor and evaluate the success of their programming strategies, and fold in advocacy to create sustainable support for female condoms among decision makers.
- Building on already strong support for female condoms, the U.S. government can enhance its leadership by integrating female condom programming into family planning and HIV/AIDS programs, providing technical assistance and training to providers and community health educators, engaging social marketers on the country level, and disaggregating female condom programming data from male condom data to accurately assess the effectiveness of female condom promotion strategies.

[For a fully referenced version of this fact sheet please see: bit.ly/FCfactsheetcitations](http://bit.ly/FCfactsheetcitations)

### ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH AND GENDER EQUITY (CHANGE)

[The Center for Health and Gender Equity \(CHANGE\)](http://www.genderhealth.org) is a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization that promotes the sexual and reproductive health and human rights of women and girls worldwide through education and advocacy efforts that affect the development and implementation of U.S. policies.