

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

*Updated September 2017*

Female condoms are currently the only available prevention method designed for women to initiate that provide effective protection against unintended pregnancy and STI and HIV transmission. They are also an important method of protection for people of all genders who engage in receptive vaginal or anal sex, as female condoms give 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, such as the FC2, which is 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.<sup>1</sup>
- Studies have shown that the female condom is at least as effective as the male condom in reducing the risk of contracting STIs,<sup>2</sup> and can reduce the per-act probability of HIV transmission by more than 90 percent.<sup>3</sup>
- Female condoms are effective at preventing pregnancies, with prevention rates comparable to male condoms.<sup>4</sup>
- Studies have shown that when promoted and distributed alongside male condoms, female condoms can increase the number of protected sex acts.<sup>5</sup>
- Studies have shown positive responses to female condoms from women and men of various ages, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and geographic location.<sup>6</sup>

### 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.<sup>7</sup>
- 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.<sup>8</sup>
- Widespread availability of female condoms, alongside other available prevention methods, leads to more protected sex acts, which can lead to broad economic and social benefits.<sup>9</sup>
- Learning how to use female condoms can empower women and make them feel more autonomous.<sup>10</sup>
- Female condoms are designed for women to initiate and can be inserted well in advance of intercourse. As a result, 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.<sup>11</sup>
- 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.<sup>12</sup>

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- 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 used as part of foreplay.<sup>13</sup>

### 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 2015, USAID procured nearly 11 million female condoms, investing about \$6.4 million in female condom commodities.<sup>14</sup>
- USAID highlighted the need for comprehensive female condom programming and promotion in order to encourage the use of this “untapped resource” as a safe and effective HIV prevention intervention.<sup>15</sup>
- The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the U.S. government’s global HIV/AIDS program, explicitly mentions female condoms and their importance as prevention methods for women and men.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>
- PEPFAR Country/Regional Operating Plan guidance explicitly mentions female condoms.<sup>18</sup> PEPFAR’s Technical Considerations guidance, provided by PEPFAR technical working groups, includes further detail on female condom programming, specifically highlighting female condom promotion as a key component of the overall condom strategy.<sup>19</sup>
- Announced in 2014, the DREAMS partnership is an ambitious initiative between PEPFAR, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Girl Effect, Johnson and Johnson, ViiV Healthcare, and Gilead that aims 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 of HIV.<sup>20</sup>

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### 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, other STIs, or unintended pregnancy, must know where to access female condoms, as well as have the skills and knowledge to use them consistently and correctly. There is a need for increased U.S. support for female condom procurement for other STIs, such as the Zika virus, and for comprehensive programming of female condoms in family planning and HIV/AIDS programs.

- Since Zika virus is sexually transmissible, female condoms are an effective form of contraception that helps reduce the spread of Zika and other STIs. Pregnant women and their partners should have access to female condoms and information about their use to prevent sexual transmission of Zika during pregnancy.
- Comprehensive female condom programming should include activities like social marketing strategies to encourage behavior change, capacity building and training, and community outreach. Activities should involve teaching men and women not only how to use female condoms, but also how to negotiate condom use and how to talk about sexuality.<sup>21</sup>
- Effective family planning and HIV programs that include female condoms should monitor and evaluate the success of their programming strategies, and fold in advocacy to create sustainable support for female condoms among decision makers.<sup>22</sup>
- Building on already strong support for female condoms, the U.S. government can enhance its leadership by (1) integrating female condom programming into family planning and HIV/AIDS programs, (2) providing technical assistance and training to providers and community health educators, (3) engaging social marketers at the country level, and (4) disaggregating female condom programming data from male condom data to ensure an accurate assessment of the effectiveness of female condom promotion strategies.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>1</sup> FEMALE HEALTH COMPANY, IT'S A NEW DAY: ANNUAL REPORT 2014 6 (2014), available at <http://femalehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/female-health-ar-2014.pdf>. For a full list of female condom products that are currently available or in development, visit [www.fcmi.org](http://www.fcmi.org).

<sup>2</sup> P.P. French et al., *Use Effectiveness of the Male Condom in Preventing Sexually Transmitted Disease in Women*, 30 SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES 433, 433 (2003); Paul Feldblum et al., *Female Condom Introduction and sexually transmitted infection prevalence: results of a community intervention trial in Kenya*, 15 AIDS 1037, 1043 (2001); Arnaud Fontanet et al., *Protection against sexually transmitted diseases by granting sex workers in Thailand the choice of using the male or female condom: results from a randomized control trial*, 12 AIDS 1851, 1858 (1998).

<sup>3</sup> James Trussell, et al., *Comparative Contraceptive Efficacy of the Female Condom and other Barrier Methods*, 26 FAM. PLAN. PERSP. 66, 71 (1994).

<sup>4</sup> James Trussell, *Contraceptive Efficacy*, in CONTRACEPTIVE TECHNOLOGY 747, 750 (19<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., Robert Hatcher et al., eds., 2009). See also Julia Matthews & Teresa Harrison, *An Update on Female-Controlled Methods for HIV prevention: female condom, microbicides, and cervical barriers*, 7 S. AFR. J. HIV MED. 7, 7 (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Kyung-hee Choi et al., *The Efficacy of Female Condom Skills Training in HIV Risk Reduction Among Women: A Randomized Controlled Trial*, 98 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 1841, 1845 (2008); Gowri Vijayakumar, et al., *A Review of Female Condom Effectiveness: patterns of use and impact on protected sex acts and STI incidence*, 17 INT'L J. STD & AIDS 652, 652 (2006).

<sup>6</sup> Lizzie Moore et al., *Knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and practices associated with female condoms in developing countries: a scoping review*, 6 OPEN ACCESS J. CONTRACEPTION 125, 129 (2015); Anny Peters et al., *Acceptability of a Female Condom by Sub-Saharan African Women: A Literature Review*, 18 AFR. J. REPROD. HEALTH 34, 34 (2014); WINNY KOSTER & MARIJE GROOT, MALE VIEWS ON FEMALE CONDOMS: A STUDY OF MALE ACCEPTANCE OF FEMALE CONDOMS IN ZIMBABWE, CAMEROON, AND NIGERIA 6-7 (2012), available at <http://femalecondoms4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Male-Views-on-Female-Condoms-A-Study-of-Male-Acceptance-of-Female-Condoms-in-Zimbabwe-Cameroon-and-Nigeria-UAFC-Joint-Programme-20120410.pdf>; Heather Cecil et al., *The Female Condom: What we have learned thus far*, 2 AIDS & BEHAV. 241, 247-49 (1998).

<sup>7</sup> UNFPA COMMISSION ON LIFE-SAVING COMMODITIES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN, COMMISSIONERS' REPORT 6-8 (2012), available at <http://www.unfpa.org/publications/un-commission-life-saving-commodities-women-and-children>; SARAH THURSTON & ANNA FORBES, THE BUSINESS CASE FOR FEMALE CONDOMS 13-15 (2014), available at [http://femalecondoms4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Business-Case-for-Female-Condoms\\_Final.pdf](http://femalecondoms4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Business-Case-for-Female-Condoms_Final.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Nomsa Mahlalela & Pranitha Maharaj, *Factors facilitating and inhibiting the use of female condoms among female university students in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*, 20 EUR. J. CONTRACEPTION & REPROD. HEALTH CARE 1 (2015).

<sup>9</sup> SARAH THURSTON & ANNA FORBES, THE BUSINESS CASE FOR FEMALE CONDOMS 13-15 (2014), available at [http://femalecondoms4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Business-Case-for-Female-Condoms\\_Final.pdf](http://femalecondoms4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Business-Case-for-Female-Condoms_Final.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Erica Gollub, *The Female Condom: Tool for Women's Empowerment*, 90 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 1377, 1378 (2000); Kim Rivers et al., *Gender Relations, sexual communication and the female condom*, 8 CRITICAL PUB. HEALTH 273, 285-87 (1998).

<sup>11</sup> Holly Swan & Daniel O'Connell, *The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Women's Condom Negotiation Efficacy*, 27 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 775, 788 (2012); Thulile Mathenjwa & Pranitha Maharaj, *'Female condoms give women greater control:' A qualitative assessment of the experiences of commercial sex workers in Swaziland*, EUR. J. CONTRACEPTION & REPROD. HEALTH CARE 383, 389-90 (2012).

<sup>12</sup> Alice Welbourn, *Sex, life and the female condom: some views of HIV-positive women*, 14 REPROD. HEALTH MATTERS 32, 32 (2006).

<sup>13</sup> Winny Koster et al., *Empowering Women or Pleasing Men? Analyzing Male Views on Female Condom Use in Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Cameroon*, 41 INT'L FAM. PLAN. PERSP. 126, 132 (2014); Paulo Dias et al., *Long-term Female Condom Use Among Vulnerable Populations in Brazil*, 10 AIDS BEHAV. S67, S71-72 (2006); Erica Gollub & Zena Stein, *Commentary: The New Female Condom- Item 1 on a Women's AIDS Prevention Agenda*, 83 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 498, 499 (1993).

<sup>14</sup> RHInterchange, <https://www.unfpaprocedure.org/rhi-home> (last visited Sept. 8, 2017) (includes a search feature to explore quantity and value of contraceptives distributed globally by various funders).

<sup>15</sup> USAID, TECHNICAL ISSUE BRIEF: THE FEMALE CONDOM IS SAFE AND EFFECTIVE 2 (2013), available at <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/Female-CondomsIssueBrief.pdf>.

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<sup>16</sup> Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Reauthorization Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-293, § 101(a)(12)(B), 122 Stat. 2918 (2008), *available at*

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/hr5501/text>.

<sup>17</sup> PEPFAR, UPDATED GENDER STRATEGY 10-11 (2013), *available at*

<http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/219117.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> PEPFAR, PEPFAR COUNTRY/REGIONAL OPERATIONAL PLAN (COP/ROP) GUIDANCE 2017 131 (2017), *available at*

<https://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/267162.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> PEPFAR, Technical Considerations Provided by PEPFAR Technical Working Groups for 2015 COPS and ROPS 64-67 (2015), *available at* <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/237687.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> PEPFAR, FACTSHEET: 2015 UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT (September 2015), *available at* <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/247548.pdf>;

PEPFAR, PREVENTING HIV IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN: GUIDANCE FOR COUNTRY TEAMS ON THE DREAMS PARTNERSHIP 35 (2015).

<sup>21</sup> *See generally* UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO FEMALE CONDOMS (UFAC), MAKING FEMALE CONDOMS AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE (2013), *available at* [http://femalecondoms4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/UAFc\\_implementationguide.pdf](http://femalecondoms4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/UAFc_implementationguide.pdf);

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<http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MomentumPDFforWeb.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> *See generally* UNFPA, COMPREHENSIVE CONDOM PROGRAMMING: A GUIDE FOR RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND COUNTRY PROGRAMMING 7, 9 (2011), *available at* <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/CCP.pdf>; UFAC, MAKING FEMALE CONDOMS AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE, *supra* note 22, at 28, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Anna Forbes, Mainstreaming Female Condom Uptake through Programming Investments: The U.S. Government's Current and Potential Global Role (July 9, 2014) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with CHANGE).