

## Female Condoms

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### FEMALE CONDOM PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES

- Female condoms are the only available dual protection method that prevents HIV/STIs and unintended pregnancy, and is designed for women to initiate.
- A number of female condom products are currently available through public or private markets. Among these are the FC2 female condom, made of a synthetic rubber and held in place by a plastic ring; and the VA w.o.w. "Reddy" female condom, made of latex and held in place by a sponge.
- The PATH Woman's Condom, a polyurethane sheath partially enclosed in an insertion capsule, is still in development.
- The FC2 and its FC1 predecessor are the only U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved female condoms, though the FC1 is being phased out. The PATH Woman's Condom is undergoing clinical studies to pave the way for FDA regulatory approval.

### EFFECTIVE PROTECTION AGAINST HIV AND PREGNANCY

- Studies have shown that the female condom is at least as effective as the male condom in reducing the risk of contracting STIs<sup>1</sup> and can reduce the per-act probability of HIV transmission by 97 percent.<sup>2</sup>
- As commonly used, female condoms will prevent pregnancy in 79 of 100 women using the product in the first year.<sup>3</sup> Correct and consistent use results in prevention of 95 out of 100 pregnancies in the first year. Common use of male condoms will prevent 85 out of 100 pregnancies in the first year and 98 out of 100 pregnancies if used correctly and consistently.<sup>4</sup>

### HIGH RATES OF ACCEPTIBILITY

- Research conducted in more than 40 countries demonstrates female condom acceptability among women and men of various ages, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and geographic location, is as high as 96 percent.<sup>5</sup>
- Research also suggests women and men find the female condom acceptable when it is programmed and distributed across different settings, such as voluntary HIV counseling and testing centers, family planning/reproductive health clinics, and workplace sites.<sup>6</sup>
- Studies have shown that female condoms are often used when one or both partners refuse to use a male condom.<sup>7</sup>
- Some women and men find sexual pleasure with the female condom superior to that of the male condom.<sup>8</sup>

### ACCESS TO FEMALE CONDOMS INCREASES PROTECTED SEX ACTS

- Studies from Madagascar, Kenya, India, Brazil, and the United States have demonstrated that female condom promotion and use increases the total number of protected sex acts,<sup>9,10</sup> which contributes toward reducing rates of STIs and the risk of HIV infection.
- Female condoms provide an additional protection option for anal intercourse, the sexual behavior with the highest probability of HIV transmission. However, no female condom has received U.S. FDA approval for such use.

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### FEMALE CONDOMS REMAIN LARGELY INACCESSIBLE

- In 2008, donor countries supplied approximately 18.2 million female condoms globally compared to nearly 2.4 billion male condoms.<sup>11</sup>
- In 2009, female condoms made up only 2.9 percent of total U.S. government condom shipments overseas. However, this represents an increase from 1.6 percent in 2007.<sup>12</sup>
- Barriers to female condom use and uptake include product characteristics and/or misconceptions; a lack of sustained, comprehensive programming; cultural and gender-based norms and expectations; and limited political will to make female condoms accessible through investment in procurement, distribution, programming, and social marketing.

### U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND SUPPORT FOR FEMALE CONDOMS

- Among donors, the U.S. government is a leader in supporting female condoms. It has shipped female condoms to 35 countries since 2000.<sup>13</sup>
- U.S. female condom shipments overseas increased from approximately 1.3 million units in 2005 to approximately 14.7 million units in 2009.<sup>14</sup>
- In 2008, the U.S. Congress reauthorized the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which for the first time explicitly mentioned both male and female condoms and their importance as prevention methods for women and men.
- Negative attitudes of USAID Missions and U.S. Embassies toward the female condom have significant influence on U.S. support for the product at the country level. For example, the Ugandan government recently re-launched the female condom, yet U.S. officials there announced that they would not support the program.

- In December 2009, the Obama administration announced a new five-year strategy to combat global AIDS. The strategy promotes integration of HIV/AIDS services with reproductive health services, providing 100 percent of youth in PEPFAR prevention programs with comprehensive and correct HIV prevention education, and requiring the involvement of women living with HIV in program planning and implementation. These policy changes should bolster U.S. support for female condoms.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and PATH, *Female Condom: A Powerful Tool for Protection* (New York: UNFPA, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> James Trussell, Kim Sturgen, Jennifer Strickler and Rosalie Dominik, "Comparative Contraceptive Efficacy of the Female Condom and Other Barrier Methods," *Family Planning Perspectives* 26 (1994): 66-72 as cited in Ebin, Victoria et al, *In our Own Hands: SWAA-Ghana Champions the Female Condom, Quality/Caldida/Quatlle* (17) (New York: Population Council, Inc., 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHBSPH), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Health Organization (WHO), *Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers* (Baltimore, MD.: INFO Project, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/World Bank Special Programme of Research on Human Reproduction, *The Female Condom: A Review* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1997); Cecil H, Perry MH, Seal DW, et al, "The Female Condom: What We Have Learned Thus Far," *AIDS and Behavior* 2(3) (1998):241-56.

<sup>6</sup> Population Council and Liverpool VCT, Care & Treatment, *Female-Initiated Prevention: Integrating the Female Condom into HIV Risk-Reduction Activities in Kenya* (Nairobi: Population Council, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Sohail Agha, "Intention to Use the Female Condom Following a Mass-Marketing Campaign in Lusaka, Zambia," *American Journal of Public Health* 91 (2) (2001): 307-310.

<sup>8</sup> Paulo Dias, R. Telles., Katia Souto and Kimberly Page-Shafer, "Long Term Female Condom Use among Vulnerable Populations in Brazil," *AIDS and Behavior* 10 (1) (2006): 71.

<sup>9</sup> Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), *Saving Lives Now: Female Condoms and the Role of U.S. Foreign Aid* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Health and Gender Equity, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Kyung-Hee Choi, Colleen Hoff, Steven E. Gregorich, Olga Grinstead, Cynthia Gomez, and Wendy Hussey. "The Efficacy of a Female Condom Skills Training in HIV Risk Reduction among Women: A Randomized Controlled Trial," *American Journal of Public Health* 98(10) (2008): 1841-1848.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Donor Support for Contraceptives and Condoms for STI/HIV Prevention* (New York: UNFPA, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> RHInterchange. <http://www.rhsupplies.org/resources/rhinterchange.html>. (accessed July 1, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.