

# STDs and Condoms

## What do I need to know about STDs and condoms?

The surest ways to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are to abstain from sexual intercourse, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and you know is uninfected.

However, for persons whose sexual behaviors place them at risk for STDs, correct and consistent use of the male latex condom can reduce the risk of STD transmission. While condoms cannot provide absolute protection against STDs, they are the best line of defense for people whose sexual behaviors place them at risk.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states, “*Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are highly effective in preventing the sexual transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. In addition, consistent and correct use of latex condoms reduces the risk of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including diseases transmitted by genital secretions, and to a lesser degree, genital ulcer diseases. Condom use may reduce the risk for genital human papillomavirus (HPV) infection and HPV-associated diseases, e.g., genital warts and cervical cancer. \**”

## What are condoms?

Condoms are a barrier method of contraception that prevent pregnancy by keeping a man’s semen out of a woman’s vagina. Latex condoms also help prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) that are spread by semen, blood, or vaginal secretions, or by contact with infected sores in the genital area. Most condoms go over a man’s penis. A new type of condom was designed to fit into a woman’s vagina. This “female” condom can also be used to protect the anus.

## What are condoms made of?

Latex is the most common material used to make condoms today. Viruses such as HIV cannot get through it. However, some people are allergic to latex. Condoms made of polyurethane are a good substitute for persons with latex allergies.

Other condoms are made with lambskin. Because these condoms have tiny holes that are large enough for HIV to get through, **lambskin condoms cannot be used to prevent HIV or other STDs.**

## How are condoms used?

Condoms won’t protect you from HIV or other STDs unless you use them correctly. Here are some tips for using condoms:

- Store condoms away from too much heat, cold, or friction. Do not keep them in a wallet or a car glove compartment.
- Check the expiration date. Don’t use outdated condoms.
- Don’t open a condom package with your teeth. Be careful that your fingernails or jewelry don’t tear the condom. Body jewelry in or around the penis or vagina might also tear a condom.
- Use a new condom every time you have sex, or when the penis moves from the anus to the vagina.
- Check the condom during sex, especially if it feels strange, to make sure it is still in place and unbroken.
- Do not use a male condom and a female condom at the same time.
- Use water-based lubricants with latex condoms, not oil-based lubricants. The oils in Crisco, butter, baby oil, Vaseline or cold cream will make latex fall apart. Try water-based lubricants such as KY and Astroglide instead.
- Use unlubricated condoms for oral sex.
- Do not flush condoms down the toilet. They can clog plumbing.

