

PRIORITIES

Are there clear priorities for taking action now to increase access to and use of female condoms?



Yes. The female condom is poised for greater use and impact. The need for effective disease protection is great, and female condoms have the potential to protect the health of millions of couples worldwide.

The female condom is a key technology in the fight against HIV/AIDS that awaits the full support of the global community. There are four key steps to be taken now to make the female condom more acceptable, accessible, and available.

1. Develop greater political and social support for the female condom at local, national, and international levels.

All stakeholders—donors, clients, service providers, policymakers, researchers, and product developers—need to advocate for the female condom. Garnering and publicizing this support will contribute to greater public awareness of, acceptance of, and demand for the female condom.

2. Increase public- and private-sector investment in female condoms.

Donors and governments need to increase financial and technical support for female condom programs as one of a number of cost-effective and necessary reproductive health investments. Public-sector program managers need assistance in developing innovative female condom programs that appropriately position and market the method within their communities. International agencies, governments, and manufacturers can facilitate price reductions through joint purchasing agreements. Governments can streamline the regulatory approval and procurement and supply process for new female condom products. The private and public sectors need to invest in the development and commercialization of new female condom products, as well as develop innovative channels for marketing and distributing existing products to specific audiences.

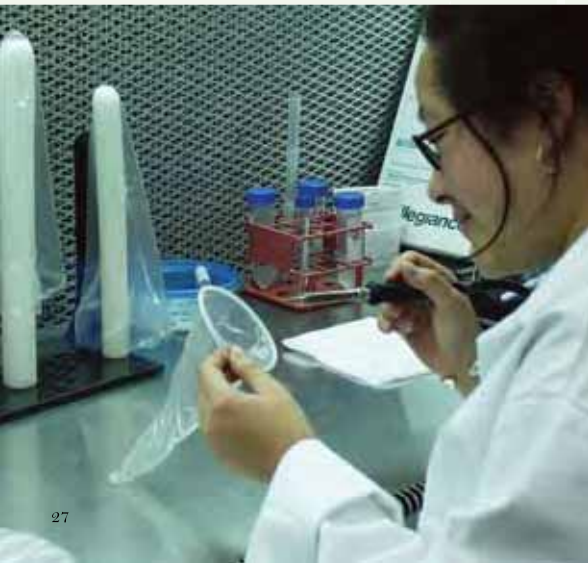
3. Scale up promotion of female condoms and monitor and evaluate impact.

Increasing outreach, especially through partnerships with employers and community and women's groups, can increase the demand for and supply of female condoms and reach new users. Specific outreach and education efforts are needed to foster men's acceptance of the female condom. Integrating female condom programming into existing reproductive health programs will increase the cost-effective distribution of the method, strengthen programs, and help make condoms part of mainstream reproductive health programming. With increased distribution and appropriate impact evaluation studies, it will be possible to document the impact of female condom programming on public health and justify continued program expansion. Greater

distribution and use of *The Female Condom: A Guide for Planning and Programming*³⁸ will be helpful in these efforts. Sharing information about successful female condom programs and lessons learned, especially related to key elements such as developing effective condom negotiation skills and involving men, will facilitate acceptance and diffusion of the female condom.

4. Conduct research to improve programming.

Rigorous studies that test ways to introduce and promote female condoms to specific audiences and evaluate the long-term impact of these efforts on public health can strengthen the case for the female condom. Operational research is needed to identify effective behavior change strategies, educate about risk, create demand for female condoms, and evaluate the impact of male involvement.

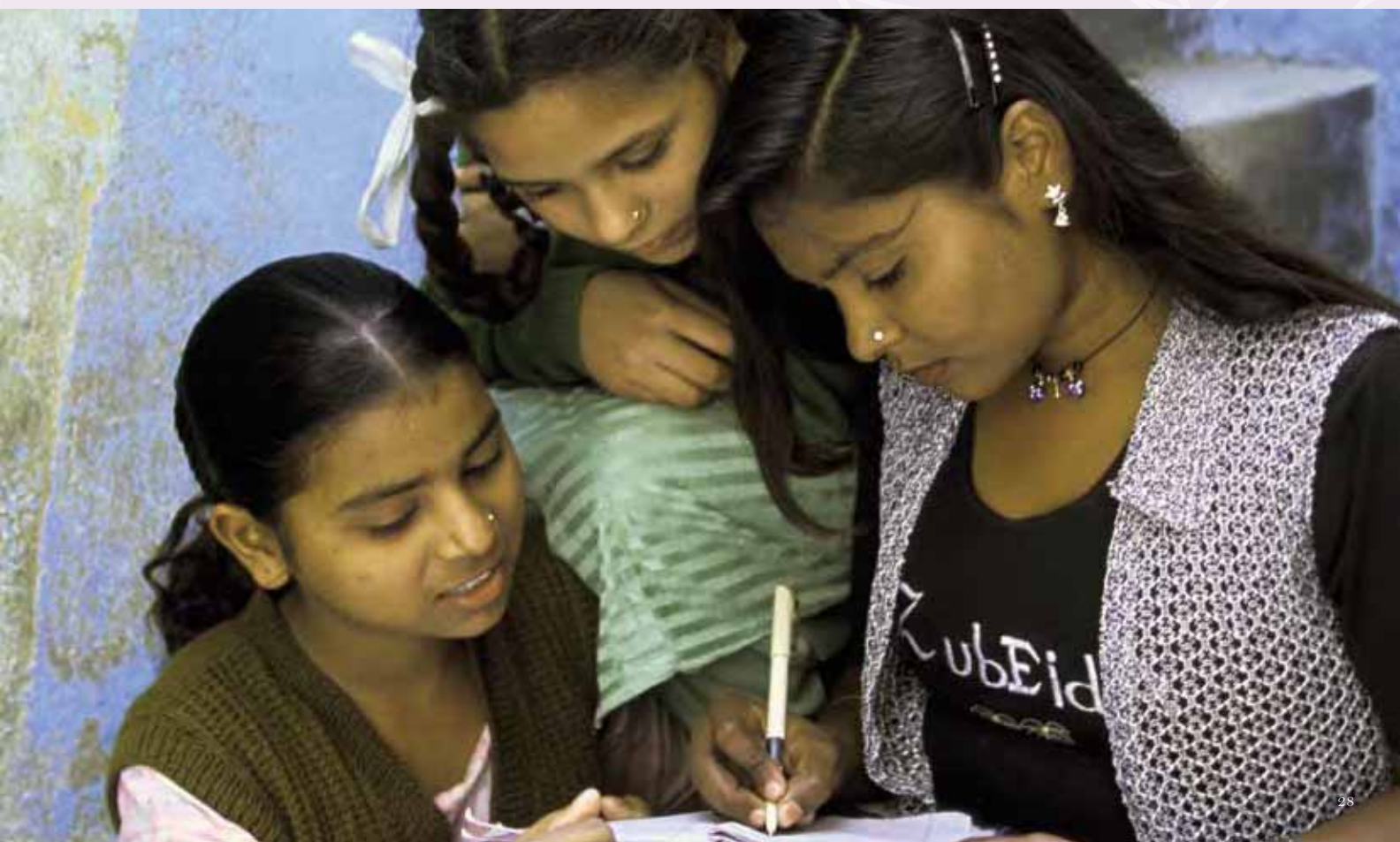


“Male and female condoms should be readily available in all health care settings ... funding should substantially increase for research into other prevention technologies, such as female condoms ...”⁴⁷

— Global HIV Prevention Working Group, 2004

A final word

Universal access to prevention, treatment, and care for those affected by HIV/AIDS is a necessary investment in the health of our communities. HIV prevention and treatment are interlinked, and the only way to make treatment affordable and sustainable is to intensify prevention efforts. Women and men whose lives are at risk need access to a range of prevention options to make the choices that best fit their circumstances. Given that the female condom effectively protects against pregnancy and STIs and is the only female-initiated STI prevention method currently available, access to this method is a public health right that needs to be ensured for all couples. The female condom is not just a promise, but an important, complementary technology that must be given a more prominent place in reproductive health programs to save the lives of millions of women and men now.



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Selected resources

United Nations agencies

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS
www.womenandaids.unaids.org

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
www.unaids.org

UNFPA
www.unfpa.org

World Health Organization
www.who.int

Program and research resources

AVERT
www.avert.org

Brazil Ministry of Health, STD/AIDS Program
www.aids.gov.br

DKT International
www.dktinternational.org

Eldis
www.eldis.org

Family Health International
www.fhi.org

The Global Consultation on the Female Condom
(PDF files containing conference presentations)
www.path.org/projects/womans_condom_gcfc2005.php

International Planned Parenthood Federation
www.ippf.org

KfW Development Bank
www.kfw.de

Marie Stopes International
www.mariestopes.org.uk

PATH
www.path.org

Popline
www.popline.org

Population Council
www.popcouncil.org

Population Services International
www.psi.org

Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit of the
University of Witwatersrand, South Africa
www.rhru.co.za

Resources for Family Planning and HIV/AIDS
Integration
www.fpandhiv.org

Reuse of the Female Condom
www.reusefemalecondom.org

UK Department for International Development
www.dfid.gov.uk

US Agency for International Development
www.usaid.gov

Manufacturers

Female Health Company
www.femalehealth.com

Hindustan Latex Limited
www.hindlates.com

Medtech Health Products
www.medtechproductst.org

Natural Sensation Company
www.natural-sensation.com.co

Silk Parasol Corporation
www.silkparasol.com

Other resources

Center for Health and Gender Equity
www.genderhealth.org

Cervical Barriers Advancement Society
www.cervicalbarriers.org

Global Campaign for Microbicides
www.global-campaign.org/femalecondom.html

Implementing Best Practices in Reproductive Health
www.ibpinitiative.org

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