

**Health Need:** Women represent nearly half of all new patients with HIV/AIDS infections worldwide; heterosexual contact is the primary mode of transmission—especially in Africa and Southeast Asia. In many countries, women lack power over sexual decisions, and they are not in a position to ask their partners to abstain from sex with others or to use male condoms.

A vaginal condom protects against both sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy. Vaginal condom use has also been shown to contribute to a woman's sense of personal control and empowerment, increase a woman's knowledge about her body and STIs, and improve communication between women and their partners.

**Technology:** The first-generation product and the only currently available FDA-approved device, the Reality® female condom has been shown to be an effective barrier against transmission of STIs and unwanted pregnancy. Calculations estimate a greater than 90% reduction in the risk of HIV infection for each act of intercourse with correct and consistent use of the vaginal condom when compared to unprotected sex.

Experience with the Reality female condom has shown that women and men are interested in and will use new barrier devices if they are acceptable and easy to use. PATH's research with users in Colombia, the Philippines, Thailand, Mexico, South Africa, and the United States found that some features of the currently available product did not adequately meet user needs. Incorporating that research into "next-generation" designs for vaginal condoms is needed.

**Current Status:** PATH has received primary funding from the USAID-supported Contraceptive Research and Development Program (CONRAD), with supplementary funding from the USAID HealthTech project, the Mellon Program Fund, the Gates EMPOWER Project, and a private donor for a project to develop, evaluate, and refine features for an improved vaginal condom.

Current activities have been a response to users' expressed interest in a softer device. The design team has begun to explore alternative features to aid insertion and achieve stability. An investigation into the key role of lubricant is also underway. Additionally, new and expanded manufacturing processes are in development to increase prototype production capacity in-house and to explore the options for low-cost, large-scale production in the future.

PATH continues to work closely with collaborative sites in South Africa, Mexico, Seattle, and Thailand to gather further user input on design features and functionality of prototype devices. The PATH team also continues to explore the cultural and regional issues that may affect acceptability of a vaginal device in these representative user populations. Independent clinical trials are scheduled to begin in early 2004.

*The Reality® female condom is a registered trademark of The Female Health Company.*



## Woman's Condom

### About the Technology:

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### About PATH:

PATH is a nonprofit, nongovernmental, international organization. PATH's mission is to improve health, especially of women and children in developing countries. To achieve these goals, PATH works with public-sector agencies and with private companies. For more information on PATH and its programs, as well as links to other development agencies and private voluntary organizations, visit the World Wide Web at: <http://www.path.org>