

# ***Female Condom: A Powerful Tool for Protection***

(Full document available online at: [www.path.org/publications/pub.php?id=1267](http://www.path.org/publications/pub.php?id=1267))

## **Talking Points**

1. Millions of women and men need protection from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The need is especially great for young women who face the highest risks of HIV infection. The female condom is not a promise on the horizon. It is an effective, female-initiated method available *now* that provides an additional protection option for women and their partners.
2. A systematic review of effectiveness studies on STI prevention concluded that female condoms confer as much protection from STIs as male condoms. Perfect use of the female condom for a year by a woman having sexual intercourse twice a week with an HIV-infected partner could reduce her risk of acquiring HIV by more than 90 percent.
3. Results from a World Health Organization multi-site trial confirm that female condoms are substantially equivalent to male condoms in terms of pregnancy prevention.
4. Investigations in more than 40 countries have found good initial acceptability of the female condom among individuals of varied age, social and economic status, and sexual history. Many women like the female condom because it gives them greater control over safe sex negotiation, is easy to use, increases sexual pleasure, and is a good option for men who do not like to use male condoms. Other women report dissatisfaction for reasons including aesthetics, difficulties in use, and cost. New female condom designs that address these concerns are being developed.
5. Female condom introduction programs that focus on innovative marketing approaches, one-on-one counseling, and couple negotiation can pave the way for future HIV protection methods, such as cervical barriers and microbicides.
6. The Global Consultation on the Female Condom<sup>1</sup> identified four key actions that can be supported now to increase access and use of female condoms and prevent infections today. These include:
  - *Well-coordinated advocacy*, both globally and at the country level, to increase awareness and commitment for female condoms.
  - *Greater public- and private-sector investment* in product development, introduction, and programming.
  - *Strategic scale-up from pilot introduction* to national campaigns developed with cooperation of all stakeholders and with well-planned monitoring and evaluation plans.
  - *Operations research within the context of increased programming* to identify how to effectively integrate female condoms into STI/HIV programs and how to reach critical groups such as married women and men.

# Broad support from the global health community

“Female condoms are of enormous importance to the fight against AIDS because they are the only existing, effective female-controlled preventive tool against HIV and other STIs. However, their use has remained frustratingly and tragically low, despite growing demand from women themselves. The barriers of price and supply must be overcome. Female condoms must be brought within the reach of all women as a core part of the world’s commitment to moving towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support.”

— Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS

“The female condom works. It is effective in preventing pregnancy and STIs, including HIV. When it is offered with good counseling and support, female condom availability results in significantly safer sex... More choice equals more protection. It’s that simple. Increased choice helps to empower women. As part of a rights-based approach to health care, women should by right have access to female condoms.”

— Dr. Steve Sinding, Director General,  
International Planned Parenthood Federation

“We must increase access to female-controlled methods of prevention to ensure that women have life-saving tools, such as female condoms.”

— Dr. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA

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<sup>i</sup> The Global Consultation on the Female Condom gathered 100 stakeholders from 15 countries in September 2005 to review current scientific and program evidence regarding female condoms and to develop plans to build support for increased promotion and distribution of female condoms as an important protection option for women and men. (Conference presentations found at: [www.path.org/projects/womans\\_condom\\_gcfc2005.php](http://www.path.org/projects/womans_condom_gcfc2005.php))