

17

What is a female condom?

A female condom is a polyurethane (soft plastic) liner that a woman inserts into her vagina before sex to protect herself and her partner(s) from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and to prevent pregnancy.



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How do they work?

A female condom acts as a barrier which keeps pre-ejaculate fluid (pre-cum) and semen from contacting the vagina, and prevents vaginal fluid or menstrual blood from touching the penis. This barrier protects against unwanted pregnancy and the transmission of HIV or other STIs.

How do I put it on?

- put lubricant (water or oil-based) inside and outside the condom
- squeeze the inner ring (at the closed end) and using your fingers, gently push it up as high as possible into your vagina—as you would insert a diaphragm or a tampon without an applicator
- leave the outer ring (at the open end) outside, spread over the lips of the vagina
- guide your partner's penis into the opening of the condom
- during intercourse, if the condom starts to pull out or push in, put more lubricant on the penis
- after intercourse, before standing up, close the condom by twisting the outer ring, then gently pull it out and throw it away. Female condoms, like male condoms, should not be used more than once.

Are female condoms effective?

Yes. Although no form of protection is 100% effective, all condoms approved for sale in Canada have met Health Canada's requirements for safety and effectiveness. To be protected, you must use a female condom correctly. Practice putting one on before you use it for intercourse.

What are the pros and cons?

For women who have sex with men, the potential **benefits** include:

- more power in negotiating safer sex—less need to persuade male partners to use male condoms

- less disruption during sex—female condoms can be put on up to eight hours before intercourse and they do not have to be removed immediately afterwards
- a looser fit which is not as tight as a male condom
- partial coverage of the outer lips (labia) of the vagina which helps prevent the spread of other sexually transmitted infections.
- the female condoms that are sold in Canada are made of polyurethane, not latex, so they do not cause allergies or irritation and they can be used with either oil-based or water-based lubricants.

Possible **disadvantages** are:

- visibility—if an abusive partner sees the condom and objects, it could put the woman in danger, and
- cost—female condoms are more expensive than male condoms (approx. \$3 each).

Do they work for anal intercourse?

Although they were not made for this purpose, female condoms may provide some protection against the spread of HIV and other STIs during anal intercourse. Remove the inner ring before using the condom for anal sex.

Where do I get female condoms?

Many stores now sell them. Health centres, AIDS service organizations, clinics and drop-in centres may provide samples that you can try.

For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.

For more copies of this fact sheet or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, 400-1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1
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