

Internal Condoms: A Tool to Advance Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for All

Fact Sheet

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What are internal condoms?

- Internal condoms, previously called female condoms, are currently the only non-hormonal multipurpose prevention method designed for and initiated by women and receptive sexual partners that provides effective protection against unintended pregnancy and STI acquisition, including HIV.¹
- Internal condoms are an important method of protection for people who engage in receptive vaginal or anal sex, as internal condoms give individuals agency over their sexual health.²
- There are several types of internal condoms, including the Cupid, the Phoenurse, the Woman's Condom, and the FC2.³ The FC2 is the most commonly available type of internal condom globally; it has been distributed in 144 countries since 2007 and is currently the only type of internal condom approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in the United States.⁴
- In 2018, the FDA reclassified internal condoms (not just the FC2) from Class III to Class II devices, the same class as external condoms, which makes it easier to develop, manufacture, and access the product.⁵
- In 2018, the FDA also renamed the internal condom from "Single-Use Female Condom" to "Single-Use Internal Condom" to provide a more gender-inclusive description of who can use internal condoms.⁶
 - With this change, the internal condom has been defined by the FDA as an "over-the-counter sheath-like device that lines the vaginal or anal wall and is inserted into the vagina or anus prior to the initiation of coitus."⁷

Internal condoms are an important tool to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

- Internal condoms have a flexible ring, sponge, or capsule at the closed end of the condom, which enables easy insertion and keeps the condom in place during intercourse. A ring or frame at the open end of the condom stays outside, lying flat across the vagina or anus and ensuring that the condom stays in place. All internal condoms are held in place by these internal and external plastic rings or frames.⁸
- Internal condoms are just as effective as external condoms at preventing unintended pregnancy.⁹ Because the outer ring of the internal condom covers a greater surface area on the entrance to the vagina, internal condoms can also provide increased protection against herpes, HPV, HIV, and other STIs transmitted through skin-to-skin contact.¹⁰
- As a non-hormonal form of contraception, internal condoms are a desirable option for people who prefer not to use or have had problems using hormonal contraception.¹¹
- Biological factors increase women and girls' risk of HIV acquisition, including the larger surface area of the vagina

compared to the penis, increased mucosal HIV exposure time, and the ability of HIV to pass through the cells of the vaginal mucosa.¹² As a result, women and girls who are receptive partners in penetrative sex have a greater need for effective prevention against HIV.¹³

- Widespread access to internal condoms has been demonstrated to increase the number of protected sex acts and may be a cost-effective way to prevent HIV and AIDS per HIV infection averted.¹⁴
- Internal condoms are considered multipurpose prevention technologies because they can be used to simultaneously prevent HIV, other STIs, and unintended pregnancy.¹⁵
- The safety of simultaneous use of the internal condom and Dapivirine vaginal ring, a biomedical HIV prevention technology, is unknown. Preliminary studies are ongoing to confirm if it is safe to use both products at the same time.¹⁶
- Studies show that when women are provided training and access to internal condoms alongside external condoms, internal condoms are increasingly accepted and more widely used compared to when women are not provided training.^{17,18}

Internal condoms are widely accepted and provide many benefits such as increased sexual agency and increased pleasure

- The WHO recognizes the internal condom as an essential medical device for family planning and reproductive health programs.¹⁹
- Studies have shown positive responses to internal condoms from women and men of various ages, socio-economic statuses, sexual orientations, and geographic locations.^{20,21}
- Internal condoms have been shown to provide increased pleasure for both male and female sexual partners compared to external condoms.^{22,23}
- The internal condom is an effective intervention for key populations with specific SRHR needs, including sex workers. Sex workers report that the internal condom is an effective method of contraception and HIV/STI prevention when they are not in a position to negotiate external condom use.²⁴
- The internal condom can be inserted up to 8 hours ahead of sex. As a result, it can be a useful option for women at risk of experiencing intimate partner violence.²⁵
- The internal condom may not be an effective contraceptive option if a person is not anticipating having sex, as it may not be feasible for them to find a private space to insert the condom before sex.²⁶
- Internal condoms increase the amount of reproductive control women have in their sexual relationships, resulting in reports of less stress during sex.²⁷
- Internal condoms can contribute to increased communication about safer sex and combat gender norms in various partnerships, including between sex workers and clients, married or long term partners, and HIV-discordant couples.^{28,29}

Structural barriers to increased uptake of internal condoms

- The United Nations Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children lists internal condoms as an under-utilized but highly effective tool to improve reproductive health outcomes and save women's lives.³⁰
- Internal condoms are more expensive than external condoms, which poses a barrier in promoting its use and uptake.³¹
- Many women report difficulty in accessing internal condoms due to their limited availability.^{32,33,34}
 - At the onset of any humanitarian crisis, governments are expected to implement essential SRH services as detailed in the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for Sexual and Reproductive Health, which includes guaranteeing access to free internal condoms and lubricated external condoms. Unless the MISP is implemented in crisis situations, access to internal condoms may be limited in humanitarian and refugee settings.³⁵
- Studies have shown that women perceive internal condoms to be cumbersome and difficult to insert without training or programmatic support.^{36,37,38}

The way forward

- In order to combat common barriers to internal condom use and uptake, evidence-based interventions that increase demand for the product are needed. Making internal condoms more widely available and increasing contraceptive choices can increase the use and acceptability of internal condoms.³⁹
- The updated guidelines from the FDA on internal condoms support the use of the internal condom for anal sex.⁴⁰ Research and programming must be expanded to reflect this guidance.⁴¹
- While global HIV programs such as the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and other donors procure internal condoms, comprehensive internal condom promotion must include demand creation and be emphasized in a wider range of public health programming.⁴²
 - From Fiscal Year 2017 to 2019, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) consistently procured fewer internal condoms than external condoms to be distributed through U.S. global health programs, including PEPFAR. Across the three fiscal years, USAID procured a total of 30.7 million internal condoms compared to a total of 1.67 billion external condoms.⁴³
 - In 2019, UNFPA supplied approximately 15.9 million internal condoms globally, which represented 1.23% of the total condoms supplied by UNFPA that year.⁴⁴
 - In 2020, the UNFPA’s condom supply was drastically reduced due to lockdowns and shipment issues related to COVID-19. However, the trend of supplying more external condoms than internal condoms continued, with UNFPA supplying 724.6 million external condoms globally compared to 5.5 million internal condoms in 2020; internal condoms made up 0.76% of condoms supplied by UNFPA in 2020.⁴⁵
- Unless the U.S. and other governments include both internal and external condoms as essential commodities in their COVID-19 responses and adjust programs for condom promotion accordingly, global gains to reduce HIV, STIs, and unintended pregnancies can be lost.⁴⁶

Endnotes

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