



# SHARP News



## "Navy-Issue" Condom Quality and Access

With nearly 1 million Americans infected with HIV, most of them through sexual transmission, and an estimated 15 million cases of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) occurring each year in the United States, effective strategies for preventing these diseases are critical.

**Refraining** from having sexual intercourse with an infected partner is the best way to prevent transmission of HIV and other STDs. But for those who have sexual intercourse, latex condoms are highly effective when used **consistently and correctly**. Epidemiologic studies have shown that consistent, correct condom use reduces the overall risk of STDs/HIV. Condoms are regulated as "medical devices" and must meet FDA requirements including water-leakage tests.

### *Some Questions and Answers:*

**What brand of condom does the Navy buy?** The Navy buys latex condom brands based on availability and cost. There is **no** "standard Navy issue" condom brand.

**Who pays for Condoms?** In the Navy, condoms are purchased by user Commands, just as other personal protective devices are purchased (like insect repellent, ear plugs, or hard hats).

**Which brands are preferred?** Consumer Reports (June 1999) tested 30 types of condoms and of those 28 were rated as excellent. Two failures were Durex Pure Protection Spermicidally Lubricated and Trojan Plus 2 Spermicidal. They found no problems with condoms obtained from vending machines in bars, clubs, restaurants, etc, or condoms obtained from free clinics and other health programs. CDC and the FDA published an article in the Journal and Sexually Transmitted Diseases, "An In Vitro Evaluation of Condoms as Barriers to a Small Virus" after testing 9 latex brands (470 samples) and 2 polyurethane brands (76 samples) obtained through retail distributors. In a test protocol to determine viral penetration, there was a 2.6% failure rate, which mainly came from just 2 condoms brands (they didn't name them). Given this and other published articles, along with the Consumer Reports issue, one should not conclude that any condom, including those issued to Navy personnel, offer less protection or reliability over any other brand.

**Are there Problems with Condoms in the Navy?** Researchers have found that most problems involving condoms occur with a small minority of **users**. One mistake condom users make is not using them from start to finish. Other problems stem from opening the package carelessly (teeth, fingernails) that tears the condom. The high level of protection from **consistent and correct** use of condoms is most evident from studies of couples in which one member is infected with HIV and the other is not, i.e., "discordant couples." In a European 2- year study, of discordant couples, of the 124 couples who reported consistent use of latex condoms, none of the uninfected partners became infected. In contrast, among the 121 couples who used condoms inconsistently, 12 (10 percent) of the uninfected partners became infected.

Two **potential concerns** regarding Navy-issued condoms other than incorrect and inconsistent use are: (1) they may be purchased in bulk and expire before use and, (2) they could be left exposed to temperature extremes (i.e. on deck). Either of these conditions would weaken the latex and lead to increased condom breakage.

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