



SHARP News



SHARP Reports on Condom Availability in the US Navy and USMC

Condom availability is an emotionally and politically charged issue. One fear often expressed is the mistaken belief that promoting condom access results in an increase in sexual activity. But, there is no evidence that condom availability or promotion programs increase sexual activity.¹

In a recent report, Bill Calvert, the SHARP Program Manager, expounds on condom availability issues in the US Navy and USMC. Following is the executive summary from this report:

Condom Availability in the US Navy and USMC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although either abstinence from sexual intercourse or sexual activity within a mutually monogamous relationship is the most effective means of preventing sexually transmitted diseases, proper use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of contracting STDs among individuals who are sexually active but not in a monogamous relationship. Sexually Transmitted Diseases, including HIV are a major public health threat. Military personnel are a population group at special risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases. This risk is generally 2 to 5 times higher than in civilian populations; and in time of conflict the difference can be 50 times higher or more. The young, unattached man is highly susceptible to STDs due to available time, motivation, and influence from peers to indulge in high risk behavior.

The correct and consistent use of latex condoms are highly effective at preventing STDs. According to the DoD Survey of Health Related Behaviors, condom use among sexually active, unmarried personnel at last encounter was 42% for the total DoD, with 44%, 39%, 42% and 40%, for Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, respectively. Scientific evidence has proven that condom distribution programs do not hasten the onset of sexual intercourse, nor increase sexual activity. Conversely, increasing access to condoms could lead to increased condom use among sexually active personnel which may result in decreasing incidence of STDs including HIV and unplanned pregnancy. This supports our military strategic goal for a "fit and ready force in peacetime and in conflict."

Increasing the availability of condoms is an important component of a comprehensive prevention strategy that supports STD/HIV and unplanned pregnancy prevention efforts. Additionally, condom key rings, as designed by the Navy Environmental Health Center's Sexual Health and Responsibility Program (SHARP), provide a receptacle that maintains the quality of the condoms, are discrete, provide a mechanism to the individual to have them on hand if needed, and refer users to a web site that promotes sexual responsibility.

The entire report may be viewed or downloaded from the SHARP webpage

1. Kirby D. (1994). Sexuality and HIV education programs in schools. In: Garrison, J., Smith, M.D., Besharov, D.D, eds. Sexuality and American social policy: a seminar series. Sex education in the schools. Menlo Park, CA; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1994; 1-41.