

Female Condoms: Questions and Answers

What is the female condom?

The female condom is a tube made up of a sheath and 2 flexible rings, which keep the condom in place. It is closed at one end, and designed to form a loose lining to a woman's vagina. The inner ring at the closed end fits inside the vagina, just behind the pubic bone. The outer ring at the open end stays outside the vagina, lying flat against the area around the entrance of the vagina. The BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services provides the new female condom 2 (FC2) which is thinner and less squeaky than the previously available female condom. It is latex-free. The sheath and outer ring are made of nitrile polymer and the inner ring is made of polyurethane.



When do you use a female condom?

The condom can be inserted up to 8 hours before sex. It should be removed after sex and thrown into the garbage. It should not be reused.

It should not be used with a male condom because the friction between the two condoms may cause them to break.

How do you put on a female condom?

- Choose a position that is comfortable for insertion – squatting, raise one leg, lie or sit down
- Make sure the condom is well lubricated; this will help the condom stay in place.
- Squeeze the inner ring with your thumb and middle finger, and insert the inner ring and the sheath into the vaginal opening. Using your index finger push the inner ring as far as it will go. The outer ring should remain outside the vagina.
- When having sex, the penis should be guided into the condom in order to ensure that it does not slip into the vagina outside the condom.

What type of protection does a female condom provide?

- It prevents the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS.
- It is as effective as the male condom at preventing pregnancy. (75-99% effective)

What are the advantages of a female condom?

- Prevents the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS.
- Does not reduce the male partner's stimulation.
- Provides women with control and choice about their sexual health
- Is available without a prescription and has no hormonal side effects.
- Can be used by people with latex sensitivities.
- Is prelubricated and can be used with oil-based and water-based lubricants.
- Can be inserted before sex play begins (up to 8 hours before).
- Erection is not necessary to keep condom in place.
- Does not affect future fertility.

Why does the BC Harm Reduction* Strategies and Services provide female condoms?

Female condoms are a safe and effective way to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections as well as pregnancy. We provide female condoms to decrease transmission of infection and prevent unwanted pregnancy. Female condoms also provide women with control and choice about their sexual health (1, 2). It also allows both partners to be protected even if the man refuses to wear a condom. Studies show that if women are taught how to use female condoms then the uptake is higher (3). Therefore, when offering and distributing female condoms it is important to explain how to use them.

How can female condoms be ordered?

Female condoms can be ordered by harm reduction distribution sites which are approved by the appropriate regional health authority. The harm reduction supply requisition form available on-line at <http://www.bccdc.ca/default.htm> should be used, and the female condoms ordered at the same time as other harm reduction supplies. The completed form is faxed to BCCDC. Female condoms can be ordered in bags of 100; if less than 100 are required, it should be discussed with BCCDC Vaccine and Pharmacy Services.

References:

*For a definition of harm reduction please see Health file #102, Understanding Harm Reduction <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile102a.stm>

1. Gollub EL. The female condom: tool for women's empowerment. *Am.J.Public Health* 2000;90(9):1377-81.
2. Jivasak-Apimas S, Saba J, Chandeying V, et al. Acceptability of the female condom among sex workers in Thailand: results from a prospective study. *Sex Transm.Dis.* 2001;28(11):648-54.
3. Yimin C, Zhaohui L, Xianmi W, et al. Use of the female condom among sex workers in China. *Int J.Gynaecol.Obstet.* 2003;81(2):233-9.