

16 Is there an alternative to latex condoms?



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Is there an alternative to latex condoms?

Yes! Male condoms and female condoms made of polyurethane (a type of plastic) are now being sold in Canada. Microbicides are another alternative that could be available in a few years (see Question 17 “What is a female condom?” and Question 21 “What are microbicides?”).

Are polyurethane condoms as effective as latex condoms?

Yes. Although no form of protection is 100% effective, all brands of latex and polyurethane condoms that are approved for sale in Canada have met Health Canada’s standards for safety and effectiveness. When used properly, a latex or polyurethane condom can significantly reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy and the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Where can I get (male) polyurethane condoms?

Four brands of polyurethane condoms have been approved for sale in Canada. Several of these brands can be purchased at local drugstores. (See Question 17 “What is a female condom” for information about where to get those condoms.)

Who should use male polyurethane condoms?

Anyone who wants to try an alternative to latex condoms, especially people who are allergic to latex.

How do I know if I am allergic to latex?

People who are mildly allergic to latex may have skin rashes or hives, itchy, red, watery eyes, coughing, sneezing or runny nose. More severe reactions may include chest tightness, shortness of breath and shock. For some people, an allergic reaction could cause death. People who are allergic to latex could experience a life-threatening reaction without previous warning or symptoms.

People who use latex products at work, such as health care workers, tend to have more latex allergies. If you think that you may be allergic, see your doctor.

If you are allergic to latex condoms, you can try:

- a polyurethane condom, or
- “double bagging” (use a polyurethane or natural membrane condom and a latex condom—put the latex condom either under or on top of the other condom so it does not touch the allergic partner’s skin).

What are the advantages of male polyurethane condoms?

Polyurethane condoms are:

- non-allergenic
- thinner—so they let more heat through, and this may increase sensation during sex
- looser-fitting than latex condoms, and
- odourless.

They can be:

- put on either way—there is no “right” or “wrong” way to put them onto the penis (This makes them easier to put on in the dark or in awkward situations.)
- used with oil-based lubricants such as Vaseline (oil-based lubricants break down latex)
- stored longer (latex will break down from heat or cold).

What are the disadvantages?

Polyurethane condoms are:

- more expensive, and
- not as easily available as latex condoms.

What about natural membrane condoms?

Used alone, a natural membrane condom, which is made from animal intestines, does not protect against the spread of HIV. Tiny, invisible holes in the condom may allow HIV and other viruses and germs to pass through.

Talk to your partner about using condoms and try different brands to see which condoms work best for you (see Question 15 “How do I talk about using condoms?”).

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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