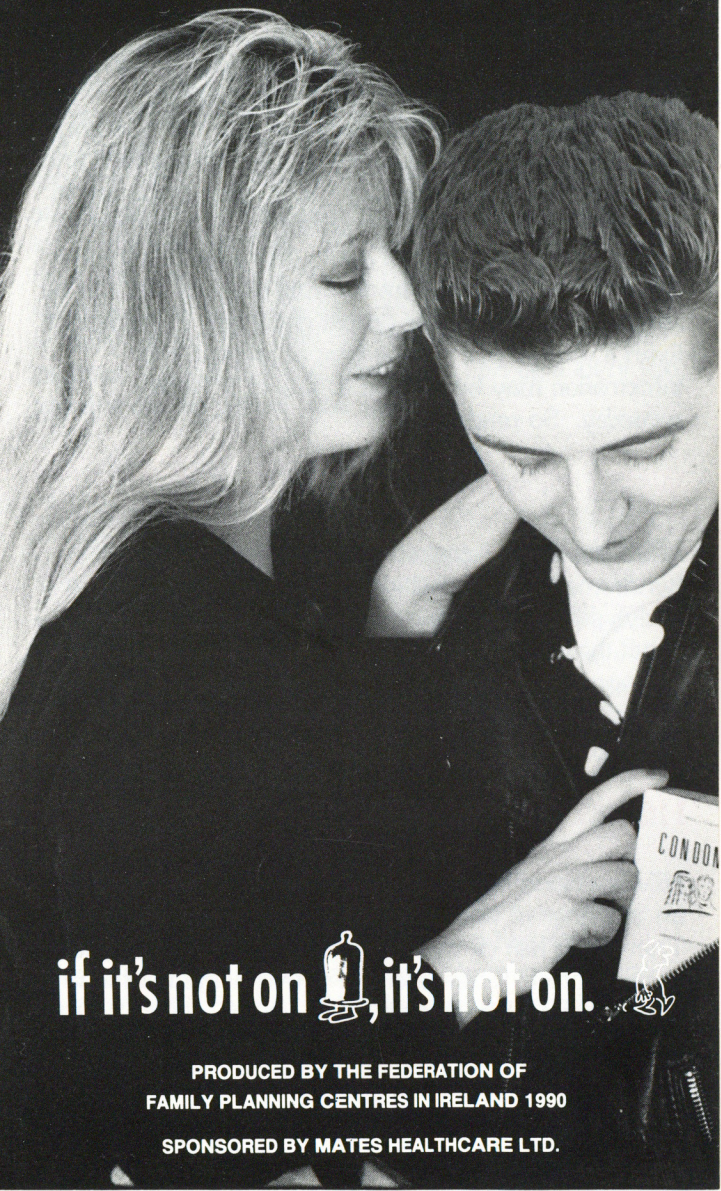
women get AIDS too



if it's not on , it's not on.

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OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

Over the last few years we have read and heard a lot about AIDS. Despite this, many people are still unsure of the facts and careless about the risks they take. Popular myth suggests that by pure virtue of the fact that you are a woman - perhaps not a drug user or prostitute, you are completely safe. This is wrong. All women, both married and single, can get AIDS if their partner is unfaithful with an infected person. AIDS is not a 'gay disease' or something that only affects certain types or groups of people. One act of unsafe sex with an infected person could prove fatal. AIDS must concern us all. To protect ourselves, our partners and our children we must be aware of the risks involved and the ways to avoid contracting AIDS. Unless you are in a long term completely faithful relationship, it's best to use condoms. Apart from AIDS, there are many other more common sexually transmitted diseases that can be avoided by following the simple guidelines in this leaflet. Even if you are not making love at present, this information may be of value to you or a friend someday. So read on.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is a condition which develops when the body's defence system is not working properly. As a result the body is vulnerable to infections which would not normally effect healthy people. These illnesses can be serious or fatal. AIDS is caused by a virus. The virus is known as HIV.

HOW IS IT PASSED ON?

HIV is a blood borne virus and is transmitted through an exchange of body fluids with an infected person. There is no risk of transmission from normal everyday social contact. There are four proven ways in which the virus can be passed on.

HOW DO YOU USE A CONDOM PROPERLY?

For some people using a condom the first time can be a bit nerve racking. Like every new experience, after a little while it becomes easier. If this is your first time to use a condom it is a very good idea for women to become confident about handling one and seeing how they work. Buy a packet yourself and practice putting one on your finger or another object before you are in a situation where you are having sex. While the condom is worn by the man many men are afraid and nervous when using them. Many are afraid that they will appear inexperienced using them or lose their erection when putting one on. With a little patience and a few encouraging words of support you can do a lot to alleviate his fears. Getting him to relax, take his time and even helping him to put it on makes it easier for him to use condoms properly. Some women actually suggest that they put on the condom for their partner. As well as being helpful this can be a lot of fun too and can be part of your love play.

MYTHS AND WORRIES

"If I'm using the pill I don't need a condom"

While the pill and other forms of contraception will protect you against pregnancy, they do not prevent semen or other fluids entering the vagina and so do not stop the transmission of the HIV virus. Why not use condoms as well if there is any possibility of contacting a sexual disease?

"If I carry condoms I may give the wrong impression"

Far from it. These days you are giving the right impression, that you are a responsible lover who really cares for your partner. If he does not use condoms can you really trust being close with him?

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1. Intimate unsafe sexual contact involving an exchange of body fluids with an infected person. Most women with AIDS or HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) have acquired it from having sex with a man who has been in contact with the virus. HIV can be transmitted in semen entering the woman's body through sex This includes vaginal and oral sex.

2. Sharing injection needles and syringes with an infected person. Do not share needles or syringes with other people. Just one injection could be fatal.

3. Transmission through blood transfusion with products taken from an infected person. There is no risk of infection from blood products in Ireland as all blood is screened. There is no risk in donating blood.

4. From an infected pregnant mother to her baby in some cases.

SAFER SEX

Sex is still one of the most loving and enjoyable ways of showing special feelings for someone you care about. But caring also involves looking after your own and your partners health. More and more people are beginning to realise that 'safer sex' is an important part of being responsible and mature about sex. One way of avoiding the transmission of HIV is to remain faithful to one partner who is also faithful to you. This assumes that neither you or your partner has ever had sexual contact with another person. An infected person may not have any symptoms of illness, so having sex with someone who appears and looks well is not a safeguard, particularly if you are unsure of their sexual history. Abstaining from sex altogether is another way of avoiding transmission. You can still be physically close with your partner without exchanging body fluids. **Think and talk before having sex.** Make sure you feel happy, comfortable and safe about having sex. If in doubt go without. The more sexually excited you get, the more difficult it is to talk about 'safer sex' and condoms. Talk to your partner beforehand.

Condoms used correctly offer a great deal of protection against HIV, and many other sexually transmitted diseases. The condom's reliability depends greatly on how well they are used and if you use them each time you have sex. Careful attention should be paid to putting them on properly. Condoms reduce, but do not eliminate the risk of infection. They do not guarantee 100% protection but if you are having sex they are very much safer than using nothing.

Condoms protect both the man and the woman. While condoms are worn by the man they are equally important to women's health so it is important to carry them with you and ensure they are used properly.

Many people use alcohol to lower inhibitions and relax. The more drunk you or your partner are the more likely it is that you will take risks and make mistakes.

POPPING THE QUESTION

When you are physically close to someone in the heat of passion there may be too much excitement to discuss things coolly. Pick a moment before you are cuddling up together when your head can rule your feelings.

Suggesting he use a condom is not easy, but perhaps your partner is desperately plucking up the courage to mention the subject too. Chances are he will feel relieved rather than insulted.

Say something straight forward and simple like 'Have you got a condom, if not I have'. Alternatively you could suggest using the condom as contraception.

It is not that contraception and preventing sexual diseases are just the woman's responsibility - rather that women are equally responsible for their own health. By playing safe both you and your partner team up together to protect each other.

CONDOM INSTRUCTIONS.

All good quality condoms have instructions inside, but here are a few general tips.

1. Never try put the condom on when the man's penis is soft. Wait for the penis to go hard and put it on to the erect penis before any contact is made with the woman's genital (sex) area. This is important because although you may not see it, sperm can be present at the tip of the penis as soon as the man gets an erection.

2. Carefully tear open the packet, being careful not to damage the condom inside with sharp fingernails or rings. Don't use a scissors to open the packet.

3. When you take the condom out of the packet it will be rolled up. Don't unroll it yet. Place it as it is over the tip of the erect penis.

4. Place the teat of the condom between your thumb and the forefinger to squeeze out air and roll the condom using your other hand down the penis until the full length is covered. It is important to squeeze the air out so as to avoid air pockets and leave room for the man's sperm to collect inside the condom.

5. After the man ejaculates (comes off) he should slowly withdraw the penis before it becomes too soft. He should hold the bottom of the condom to his penis to avoid it slipping off.

6. After he removes the condom make sure the penis does not come into contact with your genital area as there may still be sperm on the penis.

REMEMBER

(a) Use a condom each time you have sex. Never use the same condom more than once.

(b) A spermicidal cream, foam or pessary placed in a woman's vagina and used with a condom increases your safety and protection. They also help prevent possible soreness from the friction of the rubber and reduce the chance of the condom breaking. Many Spermicidal creams, jellies and pessaries have been found to contain a chemical (nonoxynol) which may kill the HIV virus that causes AIDS. Ask about these at your family planning centre. It is important to stress that these should not be used alone - they only function as a back up to the condom for women. Do not lubricate with vaseline or other grease as this may weaken the rubber. Use a water-based lubricant like KY Jelly.

(c) Do not use out of date condoms. Check the date on the packet..

(d) Don't flush condoms down the toilet as they may cause pollution. Dispose of them carefully.

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"He says he will not get as much enjoyment using condoms"

Modern condoms are so fine and comfortable unlike the ones of old, that he would hardly know he was wearing one. Men's anxiety about using them is a perceived lack of enjoyment which has no basis in fact. Using a condom during sex helps keep it enjoyable as you don't have to worry afterwards. If he insists that he will not use a condom the only sensible thing to do is to say no to sex - for both your sakes.

"Condoms make sex unromantic"

Some people think that sex should just happen and should not be preplanned by carrying condoms and talking with your lover. There is, however nothing romantic about getting pregnant when you don't want to or contacting a sexual disease. Carrying condoms is true romance as you are showing your love by caring for your partner's health.

For further information contact your local family planning centre.

Produced by:
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