



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**Veterans Health Administration**  
**Washington DC 20420**

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In Reply Refer To: 13B

**August 16, 2001**

**UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER**

**ACCESS TO CONDOMS AS HIV PREVENTION**

1. This Information Letter provides information on the use of condoms in the prevention of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV); provides guidance and further information on the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) existing policy on providing male and female condoms through the National Formulary; and provides recommendations on the prescribing of condoms.

**2. Background**

a. In the absence of a cure or preventive vaccine, consistent use of barrier methods, such as the condom, remains the single best method of preventing transmission of HIV. Multiple cohort studies, including those of serodiscordant couples, have demonstrated a strong protective effect of condom use against HIV infection. Consistent use of condoms has been found to reduce the risk of HIV transmission by 87 to 95 percent. Condoms also play an important role in the prevention of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases that are transmitted through genital secretions or genital ulcerative diseases when the ulcers or lesions occur in areas covered or protected by the condom. Finally, as the most recent data from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention have suggested that 10 to 15 percent of cases of hepatitis C may be secondary to sexual transmission, condoms may also play a role in preventing transmission of hepatitis C.

b. Thus, education about risk reduction and access to condoms for male and female veterans is a key component of VHA's program to prevent HIV, hepatitis C and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and their impact on veterans and VHA. As the nation's largest single provider of HIV care, it is important that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) be a leader in the integration of HIV prevention into clinical care.

c. Findings from a recent national survey conducted by the Pharmacy Benefits Management Strategic Health Care Group suggest that while many pharmacies in the VA health care system routinely stock the male latex condom and the female polyurethane condom, they may be underutilized and are not routinely being prescribed to veterans with HIV, or those at high-risk for HIV.

**3. A Reminder of VA Policy on the National Formulary**

a. Both male latex and the female polyurethane condoms are currently available on the VHA National Formulary and are classified as a medical supply (VA CLASS XA900). Male and female veterans can be prescribed any type of condom, as best suits their individual prevention needs.

b. As stated in VHA Directive 2001-044, "Items listed in the FORMULARY must be made available throughout the VA health care system and cannot be made non-formulary at the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), or local level. Restrictions can be established at the national, VISN or local level for formulary items that require close monitoring to ensure appropriate use. Restrictions may include evidence-based guidelines and/or prescribing privileges for providers with certain expertise. Restrictions will not be based solely on economic issues and will not be so limited as to prevent patients with legitimate needs from receiving FORMULARY medications."

#### **4. Recommendations**

a. The Public Health Strategic Health Care Group (PHSHG) and the Pharmacy Benefits Management (PMB) Strategic Health Care Group recommend that patients with HIV routinely be asked if they wish to receive a prescription for condoms in order to help prevent transmission of HIV to others through sexual contact. Condom use is to be strongly encouraged for veterans with HIV, as part of their routine care.

b. It is strongly recommended that condom use and the potential need for prescriptions be routinely discussed with patients who:

(1) Are not HIV positive, but who report high-risk activities such as unprotected sex with multiple sexual partners.

(2) Have been diagnosed with an STD.

(3) Have a history or current diagnosis of injection drug use or substance abuse.

(4) Have tested positive for hepatitis C or hepatitis B.

***NOTE:** It is also recommended that the potential need for condoms be discussed with veterans who are being evaluated or treated for impotence or erectile dysfunction if they also report high-risk sexual behaviors or multiple sexual partners.*

c. VA Pharmacy staff are encouraged to work closely with local providers to ensure that condoms are readily available to patients who require them. To help offset the cost of increased condom dispensing, the PBM and PHSHGs have arranged for the availability of male condoms through the Pharmaceutical Prime Vendor (PPV) at a greatly reduced cost. Lubricated male condoms are available through the VA PPV for \$43.75 per 1,008. **NOTE:** *The PPV Item Number for the reduced price condoms is 4190914.*

#### **5. References**

a. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Sexually Transmitted Disease Treatment Guidelines," Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). 1993; 42 (No. RR-14).

b. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Latex Condoms and STDs Prevention Messages, July 2001.

c. Wald, A., Langenberg, A.G.M., Link, K., Izu, A.E., Ashley, R., Warran, T., Tyring, S., Douglas, J.M., and Corey. L. Effect of Condoms Reducing the Transmission of Herpes Simplex Virus Type 2 from Men to Women,” Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), 2001; 285:3100-3106.

d. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) Infection and HCV-Related Chronic Disease” MMWR 1998; 47 (No. RR-19).

6. Questions may be referred to Kim Hamlett-Berry, Ph.D., Director of HIV and Hepatitis C Prevention Service, Public Health Strategic Health Care Group (13B), at (202) 273-8929, or Michael Valentino, R. Ph., MHSA, Associate Chief Consultant, Pharmacy Benefits Management Strategic Health Care Group, at (708) 786-7886.

S/ Tom Sanders for  
Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.  
Under Secretary for Health

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