



PRESS RELEASE

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Chicago Female Condom Campaign Wants You to “Put A Ring On It!”

Health organizations launch citywide campaign to mark National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day and increase awareness, availability of female condoms

CHICAGO, IL (3/8/10) – A ubiquitous nugget of pop culture advice (“Put a ring on it!”) is the tagline of a new public awareness campaign launched today by a coalition of health organizations that aims to increase the use of a new-and-improved female condom among both women and men.

Timed to coincide with the observance of National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (March 10), the initiative is the brainchild of the Chicago Female Condom Campaign, a coalition of HIV/AIDS, reproductive justice, women’s health, and gay men’s health organizations that is working to boost awareness, accessibility and availability of female condoms.

The female condom is currently the only barrier method that can be controlled by the receptive partner, allowing both women and men to take control of their health in preventing unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

This kind of prevention option is urgently needed to keep Chicagoans healthy as numbers for STIs continue to rise. Cook County ranks first, second, and third nationwide for gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis, respectively, and reported approximately 1,500 new HIV cases in 2008, state health figures show.

African Americans comprise just 15 percent of the Illinois population yet account for 54 percent of the state’s total HIV infections, according to state health data. Just as gay men of color bear the brunt of the HIV epidemic, African-American women are disproportionately impacted by HIV, accounting for 68 percent of all Illinois women diagnosed with HIV in 2008, while Latinas account for 10 percent.

“For many women and men, condom negotiation in the bedroom isn’t an option,” said AIDS Foundation of Chicago policy manager Jessica Terlikowski, who leads the female condom campaign. “The campaign is working to ensure that Chicagoans know about this highly effective safer sex tool and that service providers are equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively promote it. The way we see it, five little words could save your life: Put a ring on it!”

The female condom is lubricated, and shaped like an open-ended tube, with a removable inner ring and an attached outer ring. The inner ring stays anchored to the cervix during vaginal sex. When used for anal sex, the inner ring can be left in, or taken out, depending on individual preference. The outer ring then covers the surface area around the vaginal or anal opening, providing increased protection against STIs that are spread by skin-to-skin contact. These unique features gave birth to the campaign’s hip tagline.

Like male condoms, there has been no research on the effectiveness of female condoms for anal sex. The Chicago Female Condom Campaign, however, as well as many leading public health organizations, confidently promotes the use of female condoms for safer anal sex.

“In a way, it’s unfortunate that it is called the female condom since it is really a tool for the receptive partner, and is a great prevention option during anal sex for both women and men,” said advocate Zoe Lehman of the Chicago Women’s AIDS Project, a founding organization of the campaign. “Both women and men engage in anal sex and the female condom is a great prevention tool to keep both partners safe and satisfied.”

The Chicago Female Condom Campaign is spreading its “Put a ring on it!” message through its website, **ringonit.org**, a Facebook fan page and a Twitter account (twitter.com/ChiFemaleCondom). The campaign has also produced stylish palm cards, a “411 on Female Condoms” brochure with easy-to-read diagrams, and a tip sheet for health care providers on how to talk to patients about female condoms, all of which can be ordered for FREE through ringonit.org.

In May 1993, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first generation of the female condom, known as FC1 (Female Condom 1). The current, second-generation version known as FC2, was approved by the FDA in February 2009, and is made of a more affordable, hypo-allergenic synthetic rubber (instead of latex), making it a viable option for people with latex allergies. FC2 is also 30 percent cheaper than FC1.

The campaign has partnered with agencies across the city to distribute female condoms for free, and is currently reaching out to public health clinics, health care providers, family planning centers, and other community-based organizations to encourage bulk purchasing. Female condoms can be purchased in bulk through the campaign, at a cost of \$.75 each, an incentive that campaign organizers hope will spur greater availability of the product.

“Female condoms provide a sense of power for women because they are able to choose to protect themselves. You don’t need to leave it to the guy,” said Dolores Benton, female condom enthusiast, and case manager for the Pediatric AIDS Chicago Prevention Initiative, a member organization of the campaign. “It’s not difficult to put it in. It’s a piece of cake.”

In the meantime, the Chicago Female Condom Campaign continues to take its message on the road. Through in-person trainings, campaign members equip service providers with the skills to positively promote female condoms, including knowledge of the correct ways to use them and where to access them.

Three in-person trainings are scheduled to take place this week. **All trainings are OPEN TO THE MEDIA:**

- **The 411 on Female Condoms: Training for Case Managers and Prevention Educators**
Wednesday, March 10 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
AIDS Foundation of Chicago, 200 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 2200, Chicago, IL
- **Protect Your Success**
Wednesday, March 10 from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Young Women's Leadership Charter School, 2641 S. Calumet Blvd., Chicago, IL
- **How 2 Get Down Political Education Training**
Friday, March 12 at 12:30 p.m.
Lincoln Library, 326 S. 7th St., Springfield, IL
- **Condom Hunt & Demonstration**
Friday, March 10 from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.
1823 W. 17th Street, Chicago, IL

The Chicago Female Condom Campaign is a coalition of HIV/AIDS, reproductive justice, women’s health, and gay men’s health organizations dedicated to increasing access, affordability, availability, awareness, and utilization of female condoms.