

The Social Conservatives' War on Condoms

Policy Brief

Conservatives in the United States Congress and the administration are waging war on public confidence in condoms. Domestically in the United States and through U.S. foreign policy, these social conservatives are promoting a sexual health agenda based far more in ideology than grounded in public health science. Among other things, they have:

- Spent more than one billion in public funding within the United States to promote abstinence-only-until-marriage programs that distort the health benefits of condoms.¹
- Earmarked at least 33 percent of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) prevention funding for abstinence programs and segmented global HIV prevention efforts through PEPFAR to include for youth only the A (abstinence) and B (be faithful) components of the ABC (abstinence, be faithful and condoms) approach to HIV prevention.²
- Removed information about the health benefits of condoms from the Web sites of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Agency for International Development (USAID).^{3,4,5}
- Included in the Office of Global AIDS Coordinator's guidance that PEPFAR funds may not be used in any setting for marketing campaigns that target youth and encourage condoms use as the primary intervention for HIV prevention—even though there are more than 11 million sexually active youth in PEPFAR priority countries.⁶
- Argued at international conferences that promoting condom use encourages teens to have sex, despite overwhelming research to the contrary.^{7,8}
- Named to the United States National Institutes of Health's advisory committee on reproductive health social conservatives whose stance is to oppose condom use on ideological grounds.^{2,3}
- Pushed the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) for condom labeling that would emphasize condom 'failure' instead of condom effectiveness.⁹

Condom Education is an Essential Tool in the Fight against HIV/AIDS

Educating youth about condoms does not promote sexual activity. Research clearly indicates that education about condoms does not lead to increased rates of sexual initiation, lower the age of sexual initiation, or increase sexual activity among young people.^{10,11,12,13} Furthermore, studies show that consistent and correct condom use can greatly reduce the risk of HIV transmission among sexually active youth.^{14,15} For all these reasons, mainstream medical organizations—like the American Academy of Pediatrics,¹⁶ Society for Adolescent Medicine,¹⁷ and American Medical Association¹⁸—strongly support providing youth with information about and access to condoms, including making condoms available in high schools.

Research indicates that young people who are educated about the health benefits of condoms are more likely than other young people to use condoms when they eventually initiate sex.^{10,11,12,13} Teens whose parents talk with them before they are sexually active about the importance of using condoms are also more likely to use condoms at first intercourse.^{19,20} Additionally, research shows that young people who use condoms at first intercourse are more than twice as likely to use condoms thereafter compared to peers who did not use condoms at first intercourse.²¹ Finally, research shows that youth who feel comfortable in talking with a partner about condoms are also more likely to use condoms compared to youth whose discomfort keeps them from talking about condoms with their partner.²⁰

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