

Condoms protect against HIV? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have a friend who is very religious and has been telling his children that since the HIV virus is so much smaller than the pores in a condom, it affords no protection, thereby making abstinence the only option that makes sense. Is there any truth to this story whatsoever, or is he just using this as an excuse to scare his kids? (Not that I would go around his wishes with his family ? just curious.)

? Atheist

Answer

Dear Atheist,

It sounds as though you want to get the facts straight when it comes to this incredibly critical topic.

Latex condoms, which are the least expensive, most accessible type of condoms at the moment, are designed to prevent the transmission of HIV, or any virus for that matter. HIV is larger than the pores in condoms. For those allergic to latex, male and female condoms made from polyurethane also provide protection. Polyisoprene condoms, a recent addition to the market, provide latex free protection and are being marketed for a natural feel.

Lambskin condoms, on the other hand, are made from sheep intestines and are now advertised as a contraceptive. Although the pores in lambskin condoms are small enough to block sperm, they **do not** protect against viruses that cause sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

Because both user error and manufacturer error exist, condom use constitutes "safer" sex, as opposed to 100 percent safe sex. The only 100 percent safe sex is abstinence ? no oral, anal, or vaginal sex. For more on failure rates and tips for correct condom use, see the related Q&A's.

As for how to talk to children and adolescents about sexual health, several organizations may offer resources. Advocates for Youth provides an online [Parent's Sex Ed Center](#) [2] with resources and information. Lastly, the [Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States \(SIECUS\)](#) [3] offers an extensive publication titled, [Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Kindergarten ? 12th Grade](#) [4].

Regardless of your religious or spiritual beliefs, talking to young people about sex in an open and honest way can be a challenging and sometimes overwhelming task. You may want to consider starting a dialogue with your friend to share some of the resources from this response. Fortunately, with some preparation and practice, the benefits may be immeasurable.

Alice!

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