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Do polyurethane condoms protect as well against STIs as latex? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Avanti is the make of a condom that is made from polyurethane rather than latex. I prefer this type of condom over latex as they can be thinner and they transmit heat better than latex. Recently the boxes have stickers on them warning that the condoms safety vis a vis HIV transmission is unknown. What's taking them so long? Do you have any inside information on their relative porosity?

—Prefers the Pleasures of Polyurethane

Answer

Dear Prefers the Pleasures of Polyurethane,

In the 1990s, the packaging of the Avanti polyurethane condom made claims about the condom's protection from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) believed to be misleading. At the time, according to officials at the FDA, these claims made by the condom manufacturer were not backed by clinical efficacy testing for contraception or STIs.

Nowadays, lab studies provide solid evidence that polyurethane condoms are comparable to latex condoms as a barrier to sperm and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Polyurethane is a plastic and stronger than latex, but not quite as stretchy. For that reason, polyurethane condoms are *slightly* more likely to break or slip. However, this performance difference is small and does not have much of an effect on the condom's overall efficacy. When used correctly and consistently, both types of condom are highly effective at preventing pregnancy and the transmission of HIV and STIs. Before it's time to suit up, you may want to check out this question in the *Go Ask Alice!* archive: [How to use a condom properly — avoid breakage or slippage](#) ^[2].

If you're allergic to latex or just prefer a thinner feel, poly condoms provide a comparable level of protection to latex. That's pleasurable news for everyone!

Alice!

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