

Food for the Hungry's Guideline on Condom Information in HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Support Programs

**“People should be good stewards of the bodies and minds
that God has given to them. They should strive to remain healthy
and to prevent illness and disease.”**

Biblical Principles for Health Development by Dave Evans and Scott Allan, 2003.

The Guideline

Food for the Hungry:

- **Promotes abstinence** before marriage and faithfulness to one spouse in marriage.
- **Promotes education** on prevention of HIV/AIDS as a vital way to curb the spread of HIV infection and reduce the stigma associated with it by employing the latest **scientifically accurate information**, whether a person chooses to be abstinent or faithful. Given the critical importance of averting new HIV infections, Food for the Hungry acknowledges that risk reduction is often a necessary and crucial shorter-term strategy and that individuals should be given full information on all means of scientifically correct HIV prevention strategies. A person must be able to make decisions about preventing HIV transmission that are consistent with their religious convictions and based on their knowledge and understanding of the risks of their individual situation.
- **Allows for the promotion of condoms in certain situations**, especially those situations in which a person can use condoms in order to prevent transmission of HIV to another person. The best example is use of condoms by a serodiscordant couple, where an HIV+ spouse chooses to have penetrative sex with their uninfected spouse, but chooses to protect their partner by using a condom. Another example is an HIV+ woman who chooses to use a condom to prevent pregnancy and thus reduces the possibility that her children will become HIV+. In these cases, both can prevent secondary injury to unexposed people. While we encourage and motivate people on primary and secondary abstinence and to be faithful to their lifetime marriage partner, we choose to educate people on condom use because we recognize that:
 - o Decisions made by sexually active people do not affect merely their own lives, but those of their sexual partners, spouses and children. Food for the Hungry chooses to stand in the gap between those who choose less protected forms of sexual behaviour (any behaviour other than a single sexual partner within the bonds of marriage). Condoms are one way to protect those who are unexposed yet highly vulnerable (e.g., those not HIV+ in a serodiscordant relationship and for the future or unborn children of HIV+ parents [see below]).
 - o When a person is HIV positive (or even fears it is so, but has not yet been tested and does not want to infect his or her partner), condoms offer some protection. Condoms are 80.2% effective in reducing heterosexual transmission of HIV in serodiscordant couples.¹
 - o When both partners are infected, a condom may be used to prevent infecting each other with new strains of the virus which may increase viral loads and speed up the progression of AIDS.²
 - o Condoms are a legitimate choice to prevent pregnancy in an HIV+ woman. Pregnancy can speed up the course of AIDS and may result in an HIV+ baby being born, adding to a family's suffering.

¹ See <http://www.globalhealth.org/assets/publications/condoms.pdf>

² Gottlieb GS et al. *Dual HIV-1 infection associated with rapid disease progression*. Lancet 363: 619-622, 2004.

- Not everyone in a population will choose to be Christian and/or faithful. Some people are prepared to stay in relationships where they know or suspect infidelity from a partner. If the partner is willing to use a condom, it will provide some protection to infected and not yet infected partners.
- When a person is accidentally in contact with HIV positive blood or body fluid that might increase his probability of getting infected (e.g., blood transfusion, shaving with a common razor), the use of condom during sexual intercourse will provide some protection to the HIV negative partner (husband or wife).
- Available scientific evidence confirms that condoms, when used consistently and correctly, significantly reduce but *do not completely* remove the risk of HIV infection.
- Promotes monogamy, but where a person is already in a **polygamous relationship**, partners should remain faithful to each other and additional partners should not be added to the relationship (i.e., the man should not take on more wives, or a woman should not take on more husbands).
- **Promotes the latest behaviour change methods** to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. This includes risk avoidance as the best way to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. After sexual debut, returning to abstinence or being mutually faithful with an uninfected partner are the most effective ways of avoiding infection.
- **Does not support programs that give false or misleading information** about prevention (e.g., that HIV will inevitably pass through holes in latex, that condoms contain HIV, or that the use of condoms guarantees 100 percent 'safe' sex). This distorts truth, damages credibility, and can alienate rather than engage individuals and others involved in mitigating the spread of HIV. It also inhibits the development of effective partnerships. People served by FHI must be made aware of the limitations inherent in the use of condoms

"We have no doubt that the ABC [abstinence, being faithful, condoms] method has been effective and will continue to be effective. Condoms are a relevant part of our message. The problem is, it is not the only message."

Dr Mark Dybul, Assistant US Global AIDS Coordinator

The Rationale

Food for the Hungry believes that:

- Abstinence before marriage, and faithfulness to one spouse in marriage, is God's plan for sexual purity and sexual expression (Genesis 2:24, Exodus 20:17, Deuteronomy 22, Colossians 3:5, 18-19, 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, 1 Corinthians 7:2). It is also generally accepted by traditions of the peoples of Africa. It enables young people and other unmarried people to avoid a host of social, emotional and societal problems that arise from sexual activity before marriage.
- As beings made in God's image, a) human life is sacred and therefore worthy of protection and nurture (Genesis 5:2, Psalm 139: 13-14, 1 Peter 2:9); b) we are responsible for the well-being of others (Leviticus 19:18, Romans 13:9); and c) we are bearers of truth and love and therefore responsible to share life-saving messages and activities (Ezekiel 3:20, Ephesians 4:15).
- Marriage is a sacred covenant, used by God as an illustration of His love for us (Genesis 2:24, Revelation 21:9). We should support God's design for marriage. Though some may choose to engage in sexual behaviour outside of marriage, faithfulness must be encouraged. Supporting a serodiscordant couples' decision to engage in monogamous but penetrative sex (1 Corinthians 7:3-4) should be approached with care, and by advising them to use a condom and to avoid sexual practices that increase the risk of HIV transmission (e.g., "dry sex"³).
- We are agents of change in an imperfect world, and must protect those who are 'innocent bystanders', the casualties of imperfect choices in a fallen world. Until an individual chooses to change, we must strive to protect those who could be injured by him/her, and to limit the damage

³ See <http://archive.salon.com/health/sex/urge/world/1999/12/10/drysex/>

that the individual can do to him- or herself. We are concerned for both the person engaged in the behaviour, and the person(s) whose lives he or she may affect. The primary injury he or she may cause is the (1) potential damage that the person is exposing his or her body to and (2) the very real damage that they are exposing their soul to by choosing to live outside of God's will. At the point that they have chosen to live outside of God's will, they are exposing themselves to both of these risks. (But, while they are choosing to live outside of God's will, if they use a condom, they are decreasing the chance of secondary injury to innocent people – injury to others who may get HIV as a result of their behaviour, especially wives and children.) It also limits the damage caused by the person's first sin so that it does not affect others or do irreparable harm to the person who has sinned, thus giving them more time to reflect on their actions, to be influenced by others, and to repent. This kindness and concern for the person and the people they may affect also makes his or her repentance more likely. (Romans 2:4).

- We must tell the truth in love, following Jesus' humble example. We refuse to act in self-righteous and judgemental ways that inhibit our ministry or our witness (Matthew 7:2, Luke 6:37, Ephesians 4:2, Romans 14:4, Romans 14:13, 1 Peter 3:8). We also refuse to hide the truth regardless of the cost to us as individuals or an organization (Zec 8:16, Gal 4:16, 1 Cor 13:6).

Definitions

1. By **marriage**, we mean:

- a marriage established by law of the country, or
- a long-term, socially-sanctioned common-law marriage between one man and one woman.

2. By **abstinence**, we mean:

- Not having sex until marriage
- Primary abstinence: delay of first sexual encounter (penetrative sex of any kind) for as long as possible, preferably until one is married or within a long-term, socially-sanctioned (e.g., common law) and committed relationship
- Secondary abstinence: Committing to abstinence for a specified period or until one is married after having had sex previously
- As a mutually agreed and free choice (one of a number of possible options) by and between HIV serodiscordant people in a relationship

3. By **being faithful**, we mean:

- Having only one exclusive, mutually faithful partner in a legal marriage relationship
- Having a single, mutually faithful partner, in a long-term, socially-sanctioned common-law marriage

Biblical References in the Condom Guideline

Genesis 2:24

²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Genesis 5:2

He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man. ^[a] "

Exodus 20:17

¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Leviticus 19:18

¹⁸ "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD .

Psalms 139: 13-14

¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Ezekiel 3:20

²⁰ "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.

Matthew 7:2

²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Luke 6:37

³⁷"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Romans 2:4

⁴Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Romans 13:9

⁹The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet,"^[a] and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Romans 14:4

⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:13

¹³Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

Ephesians 4:2

²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:15

¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Colossians 3:5, 18-19

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry....¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

1 Corinthians 6:12-13

¹²“Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³“Food for the stomach and the stomach for food”—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

1 Corinthians 7:2

²But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

1 Corinthians 7:3-4

³The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.

1 Peter 2:9

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 3:8

⁸Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

Revelation 21:9

⁹One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”