

# Condom Storage and Distribution Guidelines

Product	Required Storage Conditions	Shelf Life
Male Condoms	Below 40°C (104°F). No long exposure to high humidity, direct sunlight, fluorescent light, or ozone. Don't store near chemicals.	3-5 years
Female Condoms	No special storage conditions. Don't store near chemicals.	5 years

## Condom Shelf Life

### Male condoms

The shelf life, or time a male latex condom is useful and effective from manufacturing to use, varies considerably depending on storage conditions, temperature, humidity, moisture, and even ultraviolet light. Each of these factors can considerably reduce condoms' typical shelf life of three to five years. As a general rule, male latex condoms should be kept away from extreme temperatures (above 40°C or 104°F) and away from moisture and humidity. Even ozone, emitted from fluorescent (ultraviolet) lighting can destroy condoms within just a few hours.

### Female condoms

The manufacturer of the female condom has determined the shelf life to be five years. Storing female condoms is easier than storing male latex condoms because female condoms are made out of polyurethane, a material that is unaffected by humidity and ozone levels. They require no special storage conditions.

## Store Condoms Properly

Condoms are perishable. With proper storage, male condoms remain effective for three years to five years, depending on the manufacturer and according to national policy. Female condoms have a shelf life of five years. Exposure to direct sunlight or fluorescent (tube) light, heat, humidity, moisture, and ozone can considerably shorten the shelf life of male latex condoms. In contrast, female condoms, which are made out of polyurethane, are not sensitive to high temperatures and humidity.

To make sure that all condoms dispensed are in good condition, you must regularly and randomly inspect condom supplies, maintain proper storage conditions, and dispense condoms before they expire.

## Inspections

Careful visual inspections can detect defects and deterioration. New supplies of condoms should be inspected when they arrive, and they should be re-inspected periodically if they remain in storage for more than six months. Examine the outside of the carton and a few randomly chosen packets pulled from different parts of the carton.

Look for the following problems:

- Torn or damaged packaging,
- Leaking lubricant,
- Brittle or damaged packets,
- Yellowed or discolored packets,
- Broken seals or open packets,
- Broken strips
- Foreign matter in package.

If clients complain, take them seriously. Note the date, product, brand, type, lot number, and nature of the complaint. Try to determine whether the problem was due to the condom itself or to the client's lack of knowledge or incorrect use of the condom. For example, if a client complains of a funny smell, it may be normal for that brand. If clients complain about condoms breaking during sex, check to make sure that the condoms in that lot have not expired or prematurely deteriorated. If the rest of the lot is in good condition, ask about how the client handled the condom that broke. The client may need advice on how to use condoms correctly, for example, on using water-based rather than oil-based lubrication to maintain the strength of the latex.

If an entire carton or lot of condoms is defective, contact the supplier and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). Do not dispense condoms with defects or damage. Dispose of the defective condoms according to MDH recommendations. They must be disposed of in a way that makes them absolutely unusable. Try to identify the cause of the defects and correct it. This may mean changing suppliers, improving storage conditions, or instituting a first-to-expire-first-out (FEFO) system (see following page).

## Security

To prevent theft, keep the storeroom or cabinet locked and limit access to authorized personnel. Match any condoms put in or taken out of storage against documentation. To uncover problems, crosscheck stock-keeping records against transaction records and conduct a semi-annual physical inventory.

## Inventory

The first step in conducting a semi-annual physical inventory is to count all condoms in stock and compare the totals against the stock cards or inventory log. Then determine if any condoms are no longer usable due to deterioration or expiration and destroy them. Correct any problems you find to ensure that condoms are safely and effectively received, stored, and accounted for. If necessary, correct stock cards/inventory log and reorganize the storeroom.

## Male Condom Storage Guidelines

- Keep temperatures below 104°F / 40°C.
- Keep the humidity low, and make sure there are no leaks from roofs or windows.
- Keep condoms away from direct sunlight, fluorescent lights, electric motors, and chemicals.
- Stack condom cartons at least 4 inches (10 cm.) off the floor and one foot (30 cm.) away from the walls and other stacks, in order to allow for ventilation and cleaning.
- Arrange the cartons so that identification labels and expiration dates are clearly visible.

## First in First out (FEFO) System

- Clearly mark all cartons of condoms with the expiration date when they arrive. If the box only carries the manufacturing date, calculate the expiration date by adding the shelf life to the date of manufacture.
- Stack the cartons so that the older condoms are in front of, or on top of, the newer condoms and can be reached most easily.
- Dispense the oldest condoms first, making sure they are not at or past their expiration date.

## Source

Adapted from *Condom Programming for HIV Prevention* by [United Nations Population Fund \(www.unfpa.org\)](http://www.unfpa.org), [World Health Organization \(www.who.int\)](http://www.who.int), and [PATH \(www.path.org\)](http://www.path.org).

For complete information on how to ensure that condoms are manufactured, purchased, stored, distributed and handled properly, see WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, FHI. *The Male Latex Condom: Specification and Guidelines for Condom Procurement*. Geneva: WHO, December 2003.

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