



Female Condoms: Health Department Success Stories

Female Condoms (FCs) are a safe¹ and cost-effective² public health tool for pregnancy and STD prevention, including the prevention of HIV. Currently, the only FDA-approved female condom in the United States is the FC2, manufactured by the Female Health Company¹. State, local, and territorial health departments are uniquely poised to promote and distribute female condoms to improve public health outcomes and provide women and men with more options for safer sex. While continually battling struggles with shrinking budgets, overtaxed staff, and an often misunderstood product, the FC efforts of city health departments in New York City, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, working in close collaboration with other organizations, provide models for other health departments to follow in promoting and distributing female condoms alongside other safer sex tools.

Several key practices of these health departments' efforts have been identified, and include: building the FC awareness and knowledge of individuals by utilizing targeted education and innovative messaging, institutionalizing FC training and education for providers and community partners, and ensuring FCs are available free-of-charge out in the community.

The National Coalition of STD Directors (NCS D) and the National Female Condom Coalition (NFCC) are committed to improving the uptake of FCs and strongly encourage the distribution and promotion of female condoms by health departments.

Female Condom Facts:

- Female condoms are comparable to male condoms in protecting against pregnancy, STIs, and HIV³⁻⁹
- Making female condoms available alongside male condoms increases the total number of protected sex acts^{10,11}
- The FDA approved the FC2 in 2009 for both pregnancy prevention and protection against HIV and STDs¹

Why Female Condoms:

- Acceptable and effective protection
- Increases options for safer sex
- Hormone-free
- The FC2 is latex-free
 - Works with both water and oil-based lubricants
 - Suitable for those with a latex allergy
- Pleasurable & empowering
- Enables receptive anal sex partners to initiate protection and reduce risk of HIV and STDs
 - Please note however that neither the male nor female condom has been FDA approved for use during anal intercourse.

How Are Health Departments Doing It?

Best Practices for Female Condom Promotion and Distribution

- Mobilize communities to build awareness, acceptance, and support for female condoms
 - Involve providers and community partners in FC education and distribution program planning
 - Collect input from priority populations on materials and messaging to ensure cultural relevance and reception
 - Use social media, social marketing, and events to engage and educate communities
- Build knowledge and capacity of health department staff, community based organizations, and other partners on effective promotion strategies to increase uptake
 - Conduct skills building trainings for organizations that reach communities at risk
 - Institutionalize female condom education and training for agency staff
 - Condom education should be made available to all those interested: providers, program staff, and community members
- Increase availability and access of female condoms at individual, organizational, and community levels
 - Provide FCs free-of-charge in diverse settings including STD clinics, family planning clinics, and other service providers, and at beauty salons, libraries, senior housing facilities, convenience stores, bars, etc.
 - Publicize where FCs are available using innovative marketing and messaging

Chicago¹³

The AIDS Foundation of Chicago, the Chicago Department of Public Health, and numerous community partners comprise the Chicago Female Condom Campaign. The coalition expands awareness, access, and use of FCs throughout the city by using a combination of tactics that include public education, advocacy, and provider skills building trainings. This community mobilization strategy, along with the Chicago Department of Public Health's Community Condom Project, has resulted in increased demand for and availability of female condoms among community stakeholders. This project makes male and female condoms available free-of-charge to the public through both traditional and non-traditional venues. The increased visibility of female condoms alongside male condoms normalizes female condoms and plays a critical role in accessibility, as they are not yet widely available at commercial retailers.

Community Condom Project participants and providers of sexual health services are encouraged to attend female condom trainings to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively promote female condoms. The hands-on interactive training results in participants learning the best practices for female condom promotion, as well as new confidence and enthusiasm for female condom promotion. Taken together, the enthusiasm, knowledge, and skills enable more expansive and deeper reach in the community.



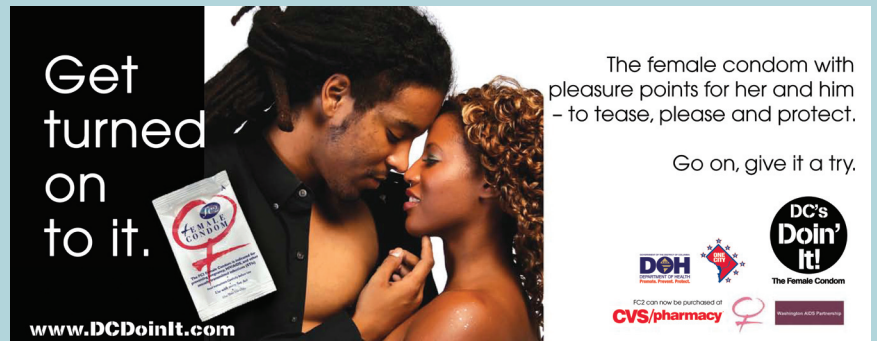
New York City¹² (NYC)

Since 1998, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has fully integrated the distribution of the FC into the Health Department's existing condom distribution program. By 2012, the NYC Condom Availability Program (NYCAP) was distributing almost 1.5 million female condoms to over 800 condom distribution partners citywide. NYCAP attributes its success to three key strategies: comprehensive program and product education, product and social marketing innovation, and product normalization. Through educational outreach, staff engage and train community members, providers, and clinical staff about FC usage. NYCAP recently debuted a comprehensive condom training, which provides information on proper use of both male and female condoms, in addition to condom negotiation skills. In 2011, NYCAP developed the NYC Condom Finder, a mobile phone app which allows users to find the five nearest condom distribution locations through GPS technology on their smartphone or by entering an address. The application also provides specific directions to each venue, the hours of operation for each location, the types of products available and helpful tips on condom usage. By increasing accessibility, integrating FC efforts with male condom distribution, and increasing public knowledge on how to use the FC, NYC is working to normalize FC use for both men and women.



Washington, D.C.¹⁴

The District's female condom campaign, a partnership between various partner organizations and the D.C. Health Department, owes its success to its education initiatives for providers and the general public, making FCs available free-of-charge through the health department, and utilizing marketing and messaging determined to be effective for the populations in the District of Columbia. Because of the trail-blazing success New York City had with educating clinical and non-clinical providers about female condoms, D.C. has focused heavily on education initiatives for those providers who are interacting with patients who may be sexually active. Trainings last from 20 minutes to three hours and can be targeted toward doctors, youth, front desk staff at clinics, and anyone in between. In addition, anyone looking to the D.C. Health Department for FCs to distribute is encouraged to receive this training, in an effort to ensure female condoms are consistently being given out alongside the knowledge to use them. And finally, using focus groups, the female condom campaign tested messaging before plastering buses with the phrase "DC's doin' it!" They found certain ideas worked for the demographics in D.C. while other ideas did not, an important idea to consider before using funds for message promotion.



San Francisco¹⁵

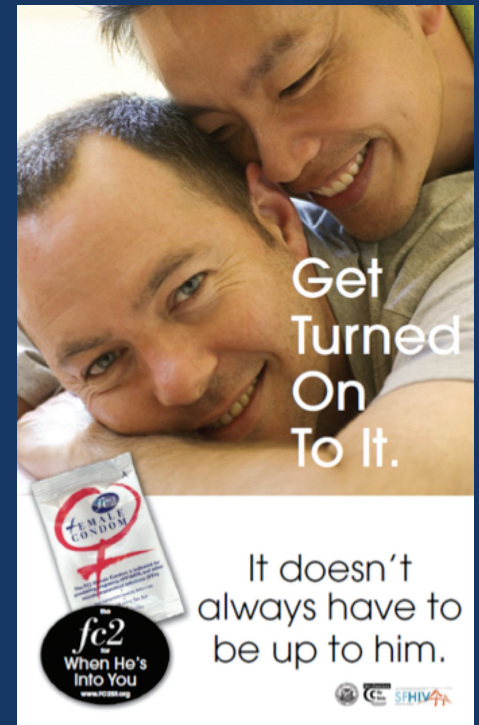
Headed by the city's health department, San Francisco relies on innovative community outreach events, the wide distribution of FCs in the community, and dedicated staff to get the job done. Their city-wide Condom Availability Program provides both female and male condoms for any venues looking to distribute them free-of-charge. San Francisco also partners with these venues for creative promotional events, like their "Bar Blitz." During this event, advocates distributed female condoms and held 10-minute demonstrations at various area clubs during prime weekend hours—targeting the sexually active and at-risk with eye-catching information. Having both volunteers and health department staff dedicated to their FC campaign is also integral to San Francisco's success. Public health interns support evaluation, data collection, and analysis, volunteers assist with distribution, and a staff member with passion for FCs has 10% of their time dedicated to the campaign.

In addition to this factsheet, the National Coalition of STD Directors and the National Female Condom Coalition have many other resources readily available to help health departments join in this fight for female condoms and safer sex. If you'd like assistance with your own FC distribution program, please get in touch with either NCSD or NFCC:

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Don't reinvent the wheel! Find educational materials, promotional resources, and more at:
www.nationalfcccoalition.org and www.ncsddc.org.



An example of effective poster marketing from the San Francisco Department of Public Health

Resources Used

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