



## Women and HIV



### Women and HIV is a major issue in South Africa.

A report published late 2004 by UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation (WHO), showed that women make up nearly half of the 37.2 million adults living with HIV worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, close to 60% of adults living with HIV are women (13.3 million).

The statistics show that **young women are three times more vulnerable to HIV infection** than their male counterparts. As well as being biologically more vulnerable to infection, many women and girls, particularly in Southern Africa, find themselves using sex as a commodity in exchange for things they need; often with older men.

### Gender and power

In South Africa, multiple partnerships are condoned and even encouraged for men, while women are expected to be monogamous and unquestioning of their partner's behaviour. Sexual refusal or negotiation may result in suspicions of infidelity and carry the risk of violent outcomes.

### Gender and financial security

in the context of poverty, young women speak of money as the driving force for sex and relationship formation. Partnerships with men who can provide financially are essential, transactional relationships (in which sex is exchanged for material goods or other support) are common, and relationships with older men are the norm.



## Prevention - Up to you

### Prevention or control of infection

While you don't want to be continually suspicious, women should find out as much as possible about prospective sexual partners (who may lie anyway). It's no longer something you can take for granted. You are, in effect, having sex with every one of their previous partners. Heads you win... tails, you get AIDS.

### The Female condom

#### The use of a condom prevents the spread of HIV and other STIs.

The female condom (sometimes called the "femdom") is another device that can assist in halting the spread of disease.



It is usually a soft, loose-fitting polyurethane sheath that lines the vagina, with a soft ring at each end. The ring at the closed end is used to put the device inside the vagina and to hold it in place during sex. The other ring stays outside the vagina and partly covers the labia.

Women who use the device correctly every time they have intercourse can expect a much lower pregnancy rate. Studies have also established that HIV and the hepatitis B virus, the smallest virus known to cause an STI, do not penetrate the condom.

Scientists are developing and testing new chemical compounds that women can apply before intercourse to protect themselves against HIV and other sexually transmitted organisms.



## HIV Positive

### Woman-specific symptoms of HIV infection



Women suffer from many of the same complications of AIDS that afflict men, but also suffer gender-specific symptoms of HIV such as:

- Vaginal yeast infections
- Bacterial Vaginosis
- Gonorrhoea
- Chlamydia
- Trichomoniasis
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) infections, which cause genital warts and can lead to cervical cancer, also occur more often in HIV-positive women.

### Early diagnosis



Early diagnosis of HIV infection allows women to take full advantage of antiretroviral therapies and preventive drugs for opportunistic infections (OIs) when their health care providers think it's appropriate.

**Bottom line: refusing to use a condom is refusing to respect your body. Where your health is concerned, your best bet is only to have sex with people who respect your body as much as you do.**