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# Does the U.S. Really Need a National Condom Day?

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National Condom Day and Valentine's Day both fall on February 14. Nobody expects Congress to observe Condom Day or for President Obama to announce that he has given the First Lady a year's supply of condoms. But it's no accident that National Condom Day and Valentine's Day are the same day. Valentine's Day is a time to say "I love you." And there is no better way to express that than to use condoms so the romance has a healthy future.

Does the U.S. really need a National Condom Day? It looks like we do. Sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) are among the most common infectious diseases, with the U.S. having the highest rates of STDs in the industrialized world. A [CDC](#) study points to rises in syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia and states that "STDs cost the U.S. healthcare system about \$16 billion every year." These diseases are preventable with proper condom use.

US educators can learn from the many successful, creative campaigns that have been developed in the US and in places like Brazil and Turkey. Such efforts are showing the way with imaginative condom education and promotion that has resulted in increased condom uptake. We need more of this.

## Using Pleasure to Promote Condoms

Bedsider, an online birth control support network for women 18-29 operated by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, takes an irreverent and cheeky approach to help women find the method of birth control that's right for them. Their current campaign, ["You didn't give up on sex. Don't give up on birth control either."](#) depicts some clumsy -- and hilarious -- attempts at sex, and encourages similar patience in finding the right contraceptive.

Take a look at The Pleasure Project, an educational resource based in the U.K. promoting safer sex to women and men. The name of their session during the 2012 [International AIDS Conference](#) spoke clearly about their mission: ["Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Pleasurable Safer Sex but Were Afraid to Ask."](#)

The Condomize Campaign, a joint project of UNFPA and The Condom Project, is a terrific example of a program that works to reduce the stigma associated with condoms, mobilize



governments and the development community to intensify access to quality male and female condoms, and motivate people at risk to use them consistently and correctly.

### **How to Build a Better Condom**

Last year, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, through its Grand Challenges program, [offered a \\$100,000 start-up grant](#) to the person who designs "the next generation condom that significantly preserves or enhances pleasure" and promotes "regular use."

The condom challenge so captured the imagination of the global health world, that a blog on this subject was named [the most read blog](#) of 2013, out of the hundreds that were published by Impatient Optimists, the Gates Foundation's blog.

But while the engineers develop new condom technology, there are plenty of condom innovations that remain under-utilized. Delay condoms, vibrating condoms, and the female condom all add new, pleasurable ways to use a condom. These can be more widely promoted.

### **Using Social Marketing to Sell Condoms**

Some of the greatest strides in family planning and disease prevention have been made through social marketing strategies that make condoms widely available and affordable, and encourage their use through education and promotion using a range of media -- old and new -- as well as concerts and festivals.

Social marketers have employed a wide range of strategies globally to engage consumers with pleasure-positive behavior change messaging. This includes sensual imagery associated with condoms, provision of sex tips in product packaging, partnership with sexologists and sex bloggers, and the introduction of new technologies that ensure safety and enhance the sexual experience.

China made history during the [2013 China AIDS Walk](#) when a giant blue dancing condom named [Mojo](#) made its [appearance](#) atop the Great Wall. MOJO Love Condoms were distributed, with close to two million condoms sold in the brand's first year.

Evidence from [Brazil](#) shows receptiveness to safer sex messages improve when [eroticism and desire](#) are incorporated into marketing efforts. This suggests that positive incentives provide the most effective way to safer sex behavior. A "safe sex can be pleasurable" message is highly successful at reaching young, upwardly mobile adults who otherwise would be at risk.

Last year, DKT Brazil's [Prudence](#) brand hit with the slogan "Quem usa Prudence manda bem" ("Who wears Prudence rocks"). The company's program to preach the gospel of safer sex in Brazilian cities included its "Test-a-Condom" program, which achieved tremendous social media success. The initiative sparked more than 100,000 website visits, 10,000 registered participants and 3,000 stories submitted from Brazil and countries around the world. More than one billion condoms were distributed in Brazil with the help of this effort.

Educators in [Turkey](#) expanded its use of the Internet and social media to help build [Fiesta](#), a premium condom brand, and promote sales and condom use. With a new website, Facebook page, Google AdWords, an e-newsletter, viral marketing, banner ads and bloggers, Fiesta

achieved strong recognition among the target audience of sexually active young people. Sales reached 4.3 million condoms in the first 18 months.

So, this Valentine's Day why not blend romance with reality and, with those chocolates and roses, give a brand new condom to someone you love?