



## Study of Women's Health Proves Value of Condoms



**Condoms** significantly reduce a woman's risk of **venereal diseases and infertility**, according to the first long-term study of its kind.

While scientifically proven to **reduce the chance of getting AIDS**, condoms' ability to guard against more common **sexually transmitted diseases**, although strongly suspected, hadn't been formally demonstrated until now.

A three-year, multi-centre study involving more than 680 American women reveals that women who insist their sexual partners always wear a condom are half as likely to get a recurring case of **Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)**, and 60 percent less likely to become infertile.

The study, published in the August issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, confirms strong suspicions that condoms can help **prevent venereal infections**, such as **gonorrhea, chlamydia, and pelvic inflammatory disease**.

The findings are bound to be controversial in the US, where critics say a previous lack of research was seized upon by the Republican administration of President George W. Bush to justify a socially conservative public health policy advising abstinence.

It's the only study out there that has backed this collective wisdom that condoms were effective in **fighting sexually transmitted diseases**," said lead author Roberta B. Ness, and internist and chair of epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. "It's really the beginning of closing the information gap."

Her study followed 684 women, aged 14 to 37, who arrived at 13 medical centres, beginning in March 1996, with symptoms of pelvic inflammatory disease- or **PID**. Over the next three years, the women were periodically interviewed about their sexual behavior to see which of them came down with the illness again, and why.

The study found a "... clear association between regular condom use and a reduced risk not only for **recurrent PID**, but also related complications such as chronic pelvic pain and infertility."

Women whose sexual partners didn't always use condoms were as vulnerable to PID as those whose partners never used them, which the researchers speculate may be because partners with a more casual attitude to **condom use** tended not to be monogamous, Ness said.

Her work counters a 1997 report by the Institute of Medicine, the main scientific advisory panel to the president, called the Hidden Epidemic: Confronting **Sexually Transmitted Disease**, which surveyed existing research before concluding that, while condoms reduce cases of **HIV**, there was insufficient evidence for their effectiveness in **fighting bacterial STD's**.