

Condom use from a female perspective: Clue's study with KI-CURT

EXPANDED RESULTS

"This is the largest and most internationally diverse study examining the effect of menstruation on current sexual practices and the use of condoms."

- Stephanie A. Sanders, Senior Scientist at The Kinsey Institute & Provost Professor and Peg Zeglin Brand Chair of Gender Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana USA

Clue and Kinsey partnered last year to investigate the effects of new tech on people's sex lives. Now we're collaborating on a study of the world's oldest sex tech—condoms—but with a new twist. What's the female take on the "male" condom?

Together with the Condom Use Research Team (CURT) at the Kinsey Institute, Clue polled 95,000 people from 200 countries on condom use and menstruation. Our focus on condom use from a female* perspective is a unique and major advancement in understanding why women do and don't use condoms, and how these choices are affected by their period and their partners.

Here's what we learned.

**All participants reported menstruation in the last three months. In this survey, 98% of respondents identified their gender as "woman", 2% of respondents listed other gender identities (such as non-binary or transgender man). In these results, the term "female" refers to respondents who identified their gender as "woman".*

Quick stats	
Total respondents	95,000
Number of countries of respondents	200

Are you ____?	
Woman	98%
Genderqueer/Nonbinary	1.3%
Man	0.5%
Prefer not to say	0.2%

Are you transgender?	
Yes	0.7%
No	98%

Prefer not to say	0.3%
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How would you describe your current sexual orientation?	
Straight/Heterosexual	80%
Bisexual/Pansexual	13.5%
Lesbian/Gay/Homosexual	1.6%
Queer	1.4%
Asexual	1%
None of the above	1.3%
Prefer not to say	1.2

FINDING #1

Females play a larger role than expected in deciding when to use a condom.

- About 1 out of 5 reported that they decide (rather than their partner deciding)
- About three-quarters reported that both partners usually make the decision
- Only 5% of respondents reported that their partner usually decides about condom use

This means that “male condoms” are not necessarily “male-controlled” contraception and sexually transmitted disease protection, but that condom use involves both sexual partners and women play an active role in decision making.

Overall, most participants reported that both they and their partners make condom use decisions. However, respondents in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Dominican Republic reported the highest rates of deciding on condom use themselves: 29 to 31% reported making the decision during their period, 26 to 28% reported making the decision while not on their period.

Japan had the highest rates of respondents reporting that their *partners* make the decision about whether to use a condom (14% during their period, 21% while not on their period).

Participants and their partners have different preferences for condom use during menstruation: 41% reported wanting to use a condom on their period, compared to only 25% reporting their partners wanted to use a condom. One possible explanation for this is societal beliefs that periods are unhygienic, and sexual activity is less acceptable during menstruation. Using condoms during menstruation “to feel cleaner during sex” was a reason selected at the highest rate by respondents in China, at 62%—nearly 20% higher than any other country. Religious beliefs were rarely stated as a reason for condom use during menstruation—less than 1% cited this reason across nearly all countries.

Furthermore, there is some evidence that younger participants were somewhat more likely than older ones to say both usually make the decision about condom use during vaginal intercourse, and

that older participants were somewhat more likely to say they made the decision. However, we do not have the age of the couple, only the age of respondents themselves.

Age	I do	My partner	Both of us
14-17	14.60%	6.58%	78.82%
18-20	16.57%	5.76%	77.67%
21-24	18.66%	5.21%	76.13%
25-34	21.01%	4.47%	74.51%
35-44	24.67%	4.21%	71.12%
45-54	27.18%	6.15%	66.67%

“Across virtually all human cultures, blood is a potent symbol of life and death, health and disease, strength and weakness. Although menstrual fluid isn’t only blood, it’s not too surprising that a woman having her period and those around her may react to menstrual flow as if it’s potentially harmful to others and hence avoid contact during periods. The Clue-CURT condom survey revealed this expectation to be common across the world, with 85% changing their sexual behaviors during their periods.” —Dr. Virginia J. Vitzthum, Senior Scientist at the Kinsey Institute and Clue Scientific Advisor

FINDING #2

Condoms are used less often during menstruation.

- Of those who had vaginal intercourse when *not* bleeding in the past three months, 64% reported use of “external” or “male” condoms.
- Of those having vaginal intercourse when bleeding, 49% reported use of “external” or “male” condoms
- 30% of respondents *not* using condoms during their periods reported that they are less worried about risk of pregnancy during their period.
- One-in-three respondents *not* using condoms during periods reported that they were unconcerned about catching a sexually transmitted infection

Reported use of condoms declined 15% during menstruation. This finding is significant and concerning, because rates of [STI transmission](#) and acquisition are higher at certain times of the menstrual cycle, including during menstruation. While condoms prevent pregnancy, they are also hugely significant in reducing STI transmission. It is [possible to get pregnant during your period](#), although the day-specific risk is variable and depends on your cycle, age and health.

Respondents cited various reasons for not using condoms while on their period: 50% said they use another form of contraception instead of condoms (much higher than the 31% who said they were not worried about catching an STI), 42% said they have greater sexual pleasure without condoms, 38% said they want a more natural feeling during sex.

FINDING #3

Only 15% of respondents reported engaging in their usual sexual activity during menstruation.

People changed their sexual behavior during their periods. The survey identified which behaviors were changed, but we don't know exactly *why* people made those decisions. There are many potential explanations: societal beliefs and taboos about hygiene, cramps or discomfort affecting libido, and/or a fear of staining sheets or clothing are just a few.

- 49% reported avoiding any/all genital sexual activity during their period
- 21% reported avoiding any/all sexual activity (*even non-genital*) during their period
- 41% reported avoiding any sexual contact with their own genitals, and focused only on stimulating their partner
- 1.4% of the total sample identified as genderqueer/nonbinary. Genderqueer and nonbinary respondents were more likely than those identifying as women to report engaging in their usual sexual activities during menstruation (21% compared to 15%).

This gives us more information about the ways in which respondents adjust their behavior in relation to menstruation.

Of those who avoided some, but not all, sexual activities:

- only 1% reported avoiding vaginal intercourse (penis in vagina)
- 66% of those who have ever engaged in cunnilingus (oral sex on vagina, labia and/or clitoris) reported avoiding cunnilingus during their period, making it the most avoided of the behaviors we assessed

Respondents in Hong Kong, Ukraine, and France were the least likely to report engaging in “usual sexual activity during [their] period” at 8%, 8%, and 9% respectively. Latin American countries reported “usual sexual activity during [their] period” at higher rates (~20% and above), but some of the same countries also reported avoiding any/all sexual activity (even non-genital) during menstruation at higher rates than other countries. In effect, even within the same country, there can be highly diverse behavioral patterns with respect to sexual activity during menstruation.

Here's what this means for public health

The finding that about 75% report that the use of a condom is a joint decision highlights the need for educational programs for people of all genders. Condom education/promotion programs should provide messages that go beyond simply telling people to use condoms, and include specific information about correct and consistent condom use, help develop condom use skills and motivation, and emphasize the importance of finding condoms that optimize “fit and feel” to promote sexual pleasure.

The finding that condoms are used less often during menstruation is significant, because people may be more vulnerable to STI/HIV contraction during menstruation. Condoms are the only contraceptive method which also prevent STIs/HIV (technically, abstinence can eliminate risk, and STI/HIV risks are not eliminated completely by condom use). The best option for sexual health and pregnancy prevention is dual protection—e.g. highly effective contraception (hormonal contraceptives or an IUD) AND a condom. Several decades ago, the rise of hormonal birth control (HBC) was also associated with a reduction in use of condoms. Given STI/HIV can negatively affect future health and fertility, dual method use is highly recommended by healthcare experts

Condoms are the only way to reduce the risk of STIs in sexually active people of any gender. Nonetheless, condoms have traditionally been seen as “male contraception” because they are placed on the penis. Studies and educational efforts have focused on the male perspective. The HIV

epidemic prompted renewed effort to encourage condom use, especially among men who have sex with men, and among men with multiple partners of any gender. Males were seen as largely “controlling” condom-use decisions even when having sex with women. **Women's ability to negotiate condom-use decisions is a central component of strategies for STI/HIV prevention.**

If you get a period and have sex with people with penises, here's what this mean for you

Always use a condom with an untested partner, especially on your period.

Condoms are not only important to prevent pregnancy, they are even more important for preventing the transmission of STIs, including HIV, especially during your period. During certain times of your cycle, including your period, the changes in your immune function and vaginal environment may make it more likely you'll contract an STI/HIV if you're exposed.

Stock up on condoms.

Different partners are different sizes and different people like different types of condoms. If you're not comfortable buying them in person, order them online.

Use lube with condoms (and whenever else you want to).

The amount of fluid you produce [varies with your menstrual cycle](#). Lube helps avoid condom breakage. It is important to that you not used oil-based lubricants with condoms, as such lubricants can cause holes in condom and lead to breakage. Need help picking a lubricant? We wrote a [handy guide](#) for you.

Do you have additional questions? If so please email press@helloclue.com.