

Dear Munyaradzi

Well done for wanting to protect yourself and your girlfriend from unwanted pregnancy, HIV and STIs. Many religious organisations encourage people to abstain from sex until they are married and do not encourage the use of condoms. But people in all religions are changing; they believe it is better to use a condom to prevent HIV. Some say that sex outside marriage may be a sin, but sex without a condom – risking your partner's life – is also a sin because it goes against the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill'.

If you and your girlfriend decide to sleep together, weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of using condoms. The health benefits are clear, but you have to consider your religious opinions.

On your easier question: Condoms do not have holes and HIV cannot pass through them. They can slip or break during sex which is why they are not considered 100 per cent safe. But, as long as you use them properly and every time, they are the best way we know to prevent transmission of HIV – other than abstaining and lifelong mutual faithfulness, which are 100 per cent safe. If you have had sex without a condom, think about having an HIV test before you start having sex with your girlfriend.

Auntie Stella

ACTION POINTS

- In March 2004 Bishop Kevin Dowling of the Catholic Diocese of Rustenburg, South Africa said:

‘Abstinence before marriage and faithfulness to a single partner within a stable marriage – obviously these are key to good living and to avoid infection. However, the church ministers in the real world, so the church should give people all the options, one of which is to use a condom, not as a contraceptive, but to prevent transmission of a death-dealing virus.’

Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not?

- Have a debate on this topic:
‘You can be religious but still have your own different opinions about things that affect your life and relationships.’
- Talk to people in religious organisations who work with families and individuals affected by HIV and AIDS – what do they think about the use of condoms?
- Do you have a group in your area where young people of different religions (or the same religion) can discuss and advise each other on the challenges in their lives? If not, how can you organise one? And how can you work together to help people in the community?