

Condom reinforcement : in February 2005, a new CHAPS programme is launched, aimed solely at reasserting and reinforcing condom use among gay and bisexual men / CHAPS, Terrence Higgins Trust.

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Condom Reinforcement

In February 2005, a new CHAPS programme is launched, aimed solely at reasserting and reinforcing condom use among gay and bisexual men.

Background to campaign

Historically, health campaigns targeting gay and bisexual men have had one overriding subject: consistent and correct condom use. Over the years, other approaches to HIV prevention in addition to condom use have been presented, such as harm reduction strategies and post-exposure prophylaxis. The issues which can lead to HIV infection, such as disclosure of HIV status, have been identified and increasingly discussed in a variety of ways. This diversification of information reflects the need for a range of sophisticated information for gay men and a much needed awareness of a range of health issues, not just HIV. Consistent condom use has remained the easiest, cheapest and most effective way to prevent HIV from being transmitted. While the promotion of condom use has remained a cornerstone of HIV prevention work, this has often been delivered alongside other health messages. There has not been a national programme focusing solely on condom use in England and Wales for some time. This new programme essentially goes 'back to basics', reminding men simply and clearly that condoms prevent HIV transmission.

The Condom Reinforcement campaign

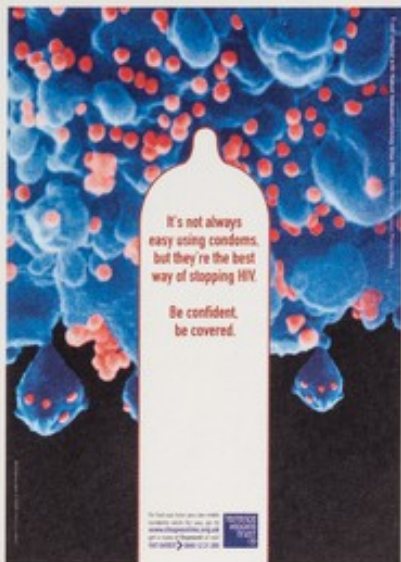
The latest CHAPS programme, Condom Reinforcement, aims to address the issue of condom use by reasserting the fact that condoms prevent HIV from being picked up or passed on during sex.

It does this through simple messages and striking imagery which clearly illustrates condoms as an effective barrier to prevent HIV transmission. The slogan, 'Be confident, be covered' asserts this idea further.

Campaign messages

The Condom Reinforcement campaign highlights three main messages, dealt separately through individual executions. Specifically, these are:

- raising awareness of the increase in HIV prevalence
- reinforcing the importance of consistent condom use, while
- acknowledging the difficulties some men experience in using condoms



HIV prevalence

The advent of new treatments for HIV has meant that men with HIV are living longer than even ten years ago. With ongoing HIV incidence and the huge fall in death rates, there are more gay men with HIV than ever before. As such, the chance of a man who doesn't have HIV having serodiscordant sex is greater than it's ever been.

During target group pretesting of this particular execution, gay men in focus groups were surprised by this, many actually believing the statement to be untrue. Only 45% of all men questioned in the 2002 Gay Men's Sex Survey reported knowing someone who was living with HIV.

Difficulties

While condoms remain the easiest, cheapest and most effective way to prevent HIV from being picked up or passed on during sex, the programme tries to acknowledge difficulties some men may experience in using them. Figures from the 2002 Gay Men's Sex Survey show that just under half of all men who had had sex with men in the previous twelve months reported having any unprotected anal intercourse in that time. While it is important to reaffirm this, some men can feel alienated or incredulous at the suggestion that condom use is always easy.

Maintaining consistent use

The third execution addresses the use of decreasing consistency in condom use among gay men. Although most men use condoms most of the time, inconsistent condom use is a significant factor in HIV transmission. Often gay men may decide it is safe not to use a condom based on a range of information about their partner: age, race, appearance and associations, for example. However, this information is not always an accurate indication of whether someone has HIV or not. This execution seeks to remind men that it is these occasions when condoms are not used for anal sex that HIV may be picked up or passed on.

Resources

The full page press advertisements will appear in *Boyz*, *qx*, *Midlands Zone*, *Bent* and *Gay Times* from the end of February through until the beginning of May. The three executions will cover a different key message of the campaign: prevalence, difficulties and consistency (see above).

While the Condom Reinforcement programme will have a press advertising base, it will also place a heavy emphasis on its web component, which is to be a long-term comprehensive resource aiming to be useful to gay men long after the press ads have finished.

The website will be a purely condom information-based resource and will cover:

- Choosing the correct condom for you
- Correctly putting on a condom
- Choosing and using lubricant
- Overcoming common condom problems

There will be a link to the *Freedom's Shop*, an initiative aimed at supplying quality condoms and lube via the web to gay men at cost price. A link to the CHAPS PEP microsite will also be included within the site, to provide help and information to men for whom a condom has broken or slipped off during sex.

This programme will also see the return of *Exposed!*, the magazine style-resource which discusses the campaign's key messages in a frank and digestible way. This edition uses a sports theme to reiterate the concept of protection as well as the photostories and graphics which have made the publication so successful in the past.

Exposed! will be inserted into a national free gay magazine as well as being distributed through CHAPS partner organisations.



In addition to these major resources, a small range of direct contact tools are being produced for use by detached workers to initiate and enhance discussions with gay men in outreach settings.

As well as the traditional condom packs and A4 posters featuring the campaign imagery, a scratch card is also to be produced.

Similar to the questionnaire cards which have been available for previous programmes, this resource uses a scratch card format which has been successfully used by several organisations for local work. These feature three 'true/false' statements; gay men then scratch away their selection to reveal whether they are correct or not. All statements are true; this is so that even those men who choose not to scratch any answer will have still absorbed a true statement.

Five things you can do to support Condom Reinforcement:

1 - Distribute Condom Reinforcement condom packs

Three different condom packs are available, each with one of the three mass media messages. If you are responsible for distributing condoms in your area, you might find these a timely resource to use with them. They also make great conversation starters in outreach settings.

2 - Display the poster in local venues

Posters can stay in bars long after outreach stalls have been packed up. Condom Reinforcement posters are a convenient A4 size which means they can be put in smaller wall spaces. Over urinals are also ideal areas as men can engage with them whilst using the facilities.

The posters come in three types, identical to the mass media advertisements.

3 - Stock local venues with *Exposed!*

The magazine resource *Exposed!* is a fun read for gay men while still being an effective health promotion tool. It can be put alongside other gay magazines in a venue but, like many other resources, can make a good icebreaker. This magazine should provide you with plenty of material to spark up a conversation with.

Please be aware that *Exposed!* does contain frank and pictorial discussion of gay sex, therefore you are advised to distribute only to men 18 years old and over.

4 - Scratch and see...

Another great conversation starter can be offering men the Condom Reinforcement scratch card questionnaire. Featuring scratch panels similar to lottery cards (which no-one can resist...) the cards ask three campaign-related true/false questions.

5 - Go online

The Condom Reinforcement website is a permanent, comprehensive resource about condoms, aimed at gay men. Lots of extra information about condom use, selection and access can be found online at www.chapsonline.org.uk. This web address can be found on all campaign materials for easy reference by health professionals and gay men.

For more information about delivering effective health promotion to men who have sex with men, get a copy of The Field Guide (the companion guide to Making It Count) from James Glavin at THT, email james.glavin@tht.org.uk

For more information on the Condom Reinforcement programme, contact Campbell Parker-White at THT on 0207 816 4646, email campbell.parker-white@tht.org.uk

To view this and previous CHAPS campaigns, visit www.chapsonline.org.uk

CHAPS

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