

## **National Condom Week Promotes Essential Effective Tool in Fight Against Unintended Pregnancy, STIs and HIV/AIDS**

### *Public Health Groups Call On Bush Administration To Stop Global War on Condoms*

Washington, DC – A coalition of reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS organizations, including Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), Global AIDS Alliance, AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project, Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), American Social Health Association (ASHA), and Population Institute today called on the Bush Administration to halt its scientifically unsound and politically motivated attacks on the efficacy of condoms and instead support their use in the fight against unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.

Public health experts and advocates agree that conservatives' efforts to marginalize condoms are part of a strategy to further an abstinence-only-until-married agenda both here and abroad. "When it comes to condoms the Bush administration and conservative policymakers are distorting information and withholding funds to satisfy an ideological agenda putting countless lives in peril," said PPFA Interim President Karen Pearl.

In 2003, fewer than half of all people around the world at risk for sexual transmission of HIV had access to condoms. Yet when used consistently and correctly, condoms are at least 97 percent effective in preventing HIV and remain the only tool available to prevent the spread of HIV during sexual intercourse. Condoms also provide some measure of protection against certain STIs, including genital herpes, syphilis, and human papillomavirus.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration's campaign to disparage condoms has gone global. The administration and its allies have promoted abstinence-until-marriage and faithfulness-within-marriage, both here and abroad, as the primary strategies for preventing unintended pregnancies, STIs and HIV. In 2002, fact sheets about condom efficacy were removed from Web sites run by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The CDC has also discontinued its "Programs that Work" initiative, which identified sex education programs that were scientifically proven to work and included information about condoms.

In April 2004, the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Randall Tobias was quoted as saying, "statistics show that condoms really have not been very effective." In fact, condoms prevent the spread of most sexually transmitted diseases and have been a key component of all successful HIV prevention and family planning programs, both in the U.S. and abroad, even in "model" countries like Uganda, Brazil and Thailand.

"A strategy that marginalizes or dismisses condom use is incomplete and doomed to failure, and risks destroying the health and well-being of families everywhere," said Pearl.