Condoms Don’t Feel Good, So Don’t Use Them, Says Philippines President

It’s like trying to eat candy with the wrapper on, Duterte tells citizens facing a fast-growing HIV epidemic.

February 20, 2018 By Trent Straube

The Philippines is facing the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in Asia Pacific—notably among young men—but the country’s president, Rodrigo Duterte told citizens to “avoid condoms because condoms aren’t pleasurable,” according to a translation from Rappler.

He was speaking to a group of Filipino workers returning from Kuwait; most of them were women. To illustrate his point, he put a piece of wrapped candy in his mouth and compared that to using a condom.

Rappler posted a video of the televised speech (see below). Though it isn’t translated in English, it does show Duterte using the wrapped candy.

Advocates and politicians immediately criticized the remarks. They stressed that condoms remain important for reproductive health and that they’re effective at reducing the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Based on a February 2018 report from the Philippine Department of Health, the country has seen a 3,147 percent spike in HIV cases in 10 years, according to an analysis from Al Jazeera. Specifically, 11,103 new cases were reported in 2017. That’s an increase of nearly 20 percent from the 9,264 cases the previous year, and it’s 3,147 percent higher than the 342 cases reported in 2017.

In fact, Duterte’s comments endanger the HIV fight in the Philippines, according to an article by Human Rights Watch (HRW).

“[I]t’s irresponsible for the Philippine president to downplay the importance of condoms at a time when the Philippines is experiencing the fastest-growing epidemic of HIV in the Asia-Pacific region,” writes HRW’s Carlos H. Conde. “Condom use can be key for reproductive health but for many years the Catholic Church has sought to restrict access to condoms in the largely Catholic country. It is at the center of UNAIDS anti-HIV strategy because they are ‘cost-effective tools for preventing [HIV and] other sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies.’ Condoms

also have an important role in assisting the 81 percent of Filipino women who want to delay or prevent childbearing and in helping to reduce the country's high maternal mortality rate."

For related POZ articles, read "HIV Cases Jump 140 Percent in the Philippines" and "PrEP Arrives in the Philippines…for Some."

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