New Improved Female Condom Available Soon in U.S.

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An improved version of the female condom, called FC2, will be sold in the United States for the first time, according to an announcement by the Female Health Company (FHC), the condom's maker.

The female condom, which debuted in the 1990s, turned conventional condom wisdom on its head. Rather than a sheath that is placed on the penis, the female condom is a long narrow polyurethane pouch that goes inside the vagina, with rubber rings to hold it in place. Though not exceptionally popular in the United States, the female condom has been popular in resource-poor countries in Africa.

First-generation female condoms were not without their detractors. According to international AIDS charity AVERT, many users have complained about the material, notably a distracting sound of a crinkling plastic bag during sex. The older female condom also could cost as much as $4 per condom retail.

The new condom is made of a much softer material that won't make as much noise, according to FHC, and the wholesale price won't exceed 82 cents per condom. FHC is hoping to work with nonprofit and governmental organizations to distribute the condom in the southeast United States, where rates of HIV among women are particularly high. They have not yet announced where they will be selling the condom retail.

The female condom has not been tested as a method of protection from HIV or other STIs during anal sex, by either women or men, though some health agencies advise against using it in this way.

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