

## Point

## Counterpoint

## Students debate distribution of condoms in public schools

Over forty million Americans are infected with one or more of the common sexually transmitted diseases (STD). These are chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, syphilis and genital warts. Over one million Americans have tested positive for HIV, and as of December 1992, 253,448 Americans were living with full blown AIDS. In 1991, 14,441 women had abortions, and eighty-seven percent of these women were not married.

I do not want to preach to you about premarital sex or about STDs. I want to tell you how you can practice safer sex.

Coming from a community where it is not uncommon for sixth and seventh graders to be pregnant, some for the second time, and knowing friends who have had back alley abortions, I have become dedicated to the cause of free condoms being available in schools.

I believe that you will see that condoms should be dispensed not only in high schools but also at Meredith College. Cost, convenience, and protection are three important reasons for making condoms available to students. I know that some of you think dispensing free condoms at schools promotes sex. I am not promoting sex. Abstinence is the safest sex. Unfortunately, millions of young adults have sex every year without protection.

My first point why latex condoms should be distributed on campuses is cost. If we want young adults to use condoms, we have to make them affordable. The twenty-five cents insurance plan that was popular when my parents were teenagers has inflated. Today a box of three generic latex condoms cost approximately \$2.50. The price of latex condoms increases with size, color, lubrication and texture.

Convenience is another reason that free condoms should be available to students. Condoms have a reputation of being easy to get, easy to carry and easy to use. Many students are embarrassed to go to the drugstore, supermarket, or even the health department to purchase or pick up a latex condom. Therefore, we should make condoms even easier to get by putting them at everyone's fingertips. Having free condoms available in designated places makes it easier for students to be protected. Here at Meredith free latex condoms could be easily and discretely located in the health department where students could pick one up when walking by.

Protection is my final and most important reason. I strongly promote dispensing free latex condoms in schools. Students, especially college students, need to become more responsible for their actions. Teenage pregnancy is on a rise. Babies are having babies. But what is more important is that the number of reported cases of women between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five are contracting AIDS is increasing. I urge you to protect yourself. One wrong partner, and your life will be dramatically changed. If Meredith College would dispense free condoms to students, I believe that more women would take the responsibility to protect themselves.

Please, I cannot stress to you enough the importance of the latex condom. The number of AIDS infected teenagers doubles every month. There are more than thirty different STDs out there, and one out of four Americans between the ages of fifteen and fifty-five will contract one.

I would like to leave you with a few more facts. If Meredith College and other schools would allow the dispensing of free latex condoms, I know many students would take advantage of this service. Cost convenience, and protection make the need for free dispensing of condoms at schools necessary. The latex condom is 97% effective when used correctly and over 99% effective when used with a spermicide. Using a condom does not only prevent birth it also prevents DEATH.

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Today, there are many new issues that arise, issues that effect adults and children alike. One such issue concerns the distribution of condoms in the middle and high schools across the country. Even a new term has been introduced. This word is "educational malpractice." Germaine Wensley, for the California Nurses for Ethical Standards, says that the school system is "crossing over the fine line from educator to advocate." The school system is deceiving students by condoning sexual activity. Condoms should not be distributed in middle or high schools because they give a false sense of security and undermine the essential authority of the parents.

Today in the United States, 7,742 teenagers become sexually active each day. Each year one million teenagers between fifteen and nineteen become sexually

active and under the age of fourteen the number is 30,000. There is no doubt that teenagers are having sex. Now the only thing to do is to figure out how to address the problem.

For an increasing number of schools the answer has been condom distribution. Many administrators believe that promoting chastity is unrealistic. But today students are facing much more than pregnancy and venereal diseases; they are facing the threat of death. The

reality is that the average failure rate of a condom has been found in many studies to be between 18 and 20%. This means that one in five adolescents using condoms face the threat of death each time he or she has "safe sex." The Food and Drug Administration says that the best that a condom can do is "risk reduction." So why in this decade when adults are changing their sexual lifestyles, are the schools teaching adolescents that condoms will keep them safe?

The distribution of condoms is not the answer to teenage pregnancy, abortion or AIDS. The condom policy is not the same as a vaccination that can be taken care of and forgotten about. A school system cannot make sure that each teenager is using a condom during sexual intercourse. Statistics show that only 45% of sexually active students use condoms, while one million are thought to be infected with the AIDS virus. Something must be done before the future adults of America have no future.

The educational system is also leaving out the parents that are essential to education today. In New York, officials believe that parents should have no part in the issue. Avoiding parents and covering up the dilemma by handing out protection promotes the family breakdown and ignores the poverty that contributes to this behavior. Chapel Hill High School is now going through meetings to decide whether or not to distribute condoms, and many parents are asking the school not to override their parental authority.

There are no easy solutions to this problem, but there are alternatives. One alternative is to promote abstinence through education. This does not solve all the problems, but it is changing many young people's lives. These programs do not eliminate discussion about birth control or condoms, but what they do differently is to try to change the students' attitude to sex and abstinence. They teach that the only real "safe sex" is no sex. Maryland is using a similar type of program and have reaped the benefits. Pregnancy has dropped 13% between 1988 and 1989. This program is community based and most importantly includes the parents. Maryland has a billboard that says, "Virgin — Teach Your Kids It's Not A Dirty Word." And this is the key to the programs. If the school works on changing attitudes instead of just saying they're going to do it, so let's help protect them, things would begin to turn around. Teenagers need to have more expected of them, not less. Let's give them that chance.

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