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South Africa experiences national condom shortage

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Male latex condoms are the most efficient technology there is to reduce the transmission of HIV among sexually active South Africans. For the past two weeks the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) has experienced difficultly in accessing an adequate supply of condoms. TAC distributes over 1 million condoms a month in the Western Cape alone. Our HIV prevention efforts are currently being undermined by a shortage of condoms which we have now confirmed to be a nation-wide problem.

Sources from the Department of Health allege that the shortage is due to a delay in awarding the national condom tender which resulted in local suppliers being notified later than expected. This delay has resulted in provincial and district stock outs where supply from the last tender has run out and supplies from the new tender have yet to arrive.

Stock outs are expected to last until the 3rd week in December. In the interim, the national Department of Health has released 7 million condoms to provinces. These condoms are expected to arrive in provinces at the end of this week (November 23-27th). The normal supply of condoms to all provinces for one month is 33 million. Therefore, the sum of 7 million condoms dispensed by the first two weeks of December in order to cover current shortages is woefully inadequate. This is especially in light of the fact that the festive season is beginning, with concomitant levels of increased mobility and sexual activity.

TAC calls for:

- Transparency. National and provincial government must work with civil society, healthcare facilities and other stakeholders to clarify the extent of the condom shortages and when they are expected to be solved.
- Interim condom distribution plans. December is a month of holiday for most South Africans. Getting an adequate supply to individuals before they migrate to family homes and holiday areas is essential. Provincial governments must work with national government and donors to immediately resolve current condoms shortages. Government must also work with international and national agencies to district and provincial stock-outs.
- A review of the national and provincial planning for condom procurement and distribution. Clear lines of responsibility and a comprehensive condom programme must be established so these errors and their potentially harmful impacts on the sexual health of many South Africans are avoided in the future.

- Condoms

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