

Condom Quality : How are Condoms Tested?

Before being put into production for the masses to use, cars get crash tested, software applications go through user and quality tests on a test environment and new ice cream flavors get taste-tested (how do I go about getting that job?). So, how do condoms get tested to ensure their effectiveness? Judging from the previously mentioned tests, why not follow in the same vein and have actual human testing? Not likely.

When it comes to condom testing, each country goes through a different government agency whose responsibility it is to standardize condoms and make sure they are effective and meet regulated safety requirements. In the United Kingdom, condoms are approved by Kitemark. Other European countries get their seal of approval by CE Mark. In the United States, condoms must go through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and meet their requirements.

With the AIDS/HIV epidemic spreading quickly across the world, it is no wonder the last twenty years has seen the testing of condoms become more refined and stringent. There are usually six tests given to ensure latex condoms meet regulated standards. These tests include an air burst test, a tensile property test, a dimension test, a leakage test, a package integrity test and a lubricant quantity test. These tests are most often given to condoms that are right off the manufacturer's floor, although they may also be administered to condoms that have been put through "real-world" scenarios that mimic aging, various temperature ranges and different storage methods.

The air burst test was developed in the 1970s and essentially inflates the condom with air until it bursts, measuring the strength of the latex, the air pressure within the condom and the amount of air a condom can withhold before it busts.

The tensile test measures a variety of latex condom properties including forces needed to bust the tested latex ring, percent elongation and tensile breaking strength. These tensile tests are used to gauge the degree that a given test material will change shape as a certain force is applied to it.

The dimension test is used to determine the length, thickness and width of the condom. While length and width are pretty much standardized around the world, thickness is the one property that varies depending on what country is doing the regulation. For example, the World Health Organization requires a thickness of .04 mm to .08mm to pass.

Leakage tests are administered throughout the course of manufacturing as well as in quality lab tests on a product ready for shipment. There are two leakage test methods. In a dry test, the condom is placed on a similarly shaped metal bar and given a charge of electricity. If a hole is present in the condom, the electric current would easily pass. In a wet test, the condom is put into a water-based solution and tested with electric currents to check for holes.

Package integrity tests have resulted in several regulatory organizations requiring that all condoms be packaged within foil packages, as foil does not allow the condoms to weaken as quickly as those packaged in plastic. In a package integrity test, the packages seal is tested by applying stress to it.

Because the varying levels of lubrication present within a condom package can slow deterioration, some organizations have requested this be a standard test, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

For more information visit: [Condom Quality : How are Condoms Tested?](#)

About the Author

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