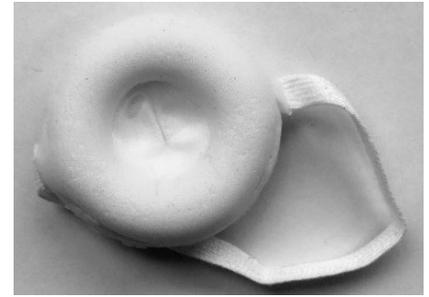


The Sponge

What is the sponge?

The sponge is a one-size, disposable piece of polyurethane foam that's put in the vagina to cover the opening to the uterus (cervix).

The sponge is filled with nonoxynol-9, which is a chemical that kills sperm (spermicide). It helps prevent pregnancy by killing sperm and preventing sperm from entering the uterus.



How well does the sponge work?

If no method of birth control is used, there's about an **85%** chance of getting pregnant after 1 year of having sex.

- With **perfect use** (this means you follow the exact directions all the time) the sponge is:
 - **91%** effective for people who've **never** given birth
 - **80%** effective for people who've given birth
- With **typical use** (this means not following the exact directions and not using the sponge the right way) the sponge is:
 - **88%** effective for people who've **never** given birth
 - **76%** effective for people who've given birth
- The sponge works better if used with another form of birth control (e.g., condoms).
- Think about getting **emergency contraception** to help prevent pregnancy if birth control wasn't used or your sponge moved out of place.
- The sponge doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.
- Use a condom **every time** you have sex (anal, oral, vaginal) to lower your risk of STIs and HIV.

How do I use the sponge?

- You can buy the sponge at a drugstore without a prescription.
- Before you put the sponge in your vagina, wet it with 2 Tbsp. of water and squeeze it once to activate the spermicide.
- The sponge has to be put in **before** the penis enters the vagina.
- Put the sponge in with the dimpled side facing toward the cervix. Leave the sponge in for at least **6 hours after** your last act of sex and then remove it by pulling on the loop.
- Don't keep the sponge in longer than 24 hours after having sex, as there's a small risk of getting a serious infection called toxic shock syndrome (TSS).

What are the benefits of the sponge?

- You can put the sponge in up to **24 hours** before sex. You're protected from pregnancy right away and it lasts for 24 hours as long as the sponge stays in.
- You can have sex more than once if you leave the sponge in for at least **6 hours after** your last act of sex.
- The sponge doesn't have hormones and it doesn't affect a person's natural hormones.

What are the disadvantages of the sponge?

- Nonoxynol-9 can irritate the vagina, cervix, and rectum. This irritation increases the chance of getting STIs including HIV.
- Nonoxynol-9 can irritate you or your partner's genitals (e.g. itchiness, redness, or pain).
- You can't use the sponge if you have any genital irritation or discharge.
- Using spermicides may increase your risk of getting bladder infections.
- You need to wait **6 weeks** after having a baby, a miscarriage, or an abortion before using the sponge.
- You can't use the sponge if you have an allergy to nonoxynol-9, are at risk for or being treated for HIV, or have a history of TSS.

Did You Know?

- You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
- You can plan ahead and talk to your partner(s) about how to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- You can consider getting regular testing for STIs and HIV. Talk to your health care provider.
- Many clinics offer low or no cost birth control.

To find a clinic near you visit **ahs.ca/srh**

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.

Websites

- ahs.ca/srh
- ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca
- teachingsexualhealth.ca
- myhealth.alberta.ca
- sexandu.ca

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