

# Russian Health Officials Comment on Proposed Condom Ban

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Russia's proposed restrictions on condom imports would make citizens more "disciplined," and may also help raise the birth rate, a Cabinet adviser and former public health chief was quoted by Russian media as saying.

Gennady Onishchenko, a former chief sanitary doctor known for his creative approach to medical advice, said Tuesday that "rubber technical goods [condoms] have nothing to do with health," state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

Onishchenko was commenting on import restrictions proposed by the Industry and Trade Ministry earlier in the day, which also called for a ban on X-ray and ultrasound machines, defibrillators, incubators and other medical equipment.

Banning condom imports "will simply make one more disciplined, more strict and discriminating in choosing partners, and maybe will do a favor to our society in respect to solving demographic problems," Onishchenko was quoted by RIA Novosti as saying.

His comments come at a time when sexually transmitted diseases are widespread in Russia and HIV infection rates are on the rise, even as most European countries have succeeded in bringing them down.

But the head of a federal center for combating AIDS, Vadim Pokrovsky, argued that there is "no direct link" between HIV infection rates and the availability of imported condoms, because they are too pricey for many students and other low-income Russians, Interfax news agency reported.

"If a [trade school] student has to choose whether to buy a beer or a condom, he will probably buy a beer, because it's cheaper," Pokrovsky was quoted as saying.

The real issue is the shortage of cheap condoms in the country, he said, conceding, however, that the quality of the cheaper varieties that are available might not make them particularly popular.

"Of course, there is a question of quality, and in this regard a problem certainly exists," Pokrovsky was quoted by Interfax as saying.

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