

WHO official welcomes Pope's statement on condoms

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(AP) -- The World Health Organization on Thursday welcomed a statement by Pope Benedict XVI that condoms can help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

"The Pope's statement is in line with evidence that condoms are highly effective in preventing infection with the [HIV virus](#)," said Dr. Shin Young-soo, WHO's regional director for the Western Pacific, based in Manila.

Shin said he hoped while the Pope did not endorse condoms for [contraception](#), his statement will soften resistance to its use, particularly from the Catholic Church.

Unprotected sex has been the "central driver" of the AIDS epidemic in Asia-Pacific, where 1.4 million people have the disease - more than double the number 10 years ago, he said.

The number of people infected with HIV is rising 130,000-150,000 each year in the region, mostly because of high-risk behavior such as [unprotected sex](#) and the sharing of drug needles.

About 20 percent of sex workers and 30 percent of men having intercourse with other men are infected with HIV in Asia, Shin said.

The region, however, has succeeded in preventing a large-scale spread of HIV among sex workers, particularly in China and Myanmar, primarily

because of intensive condom-use programs, he said.

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