Three dorms receive condom machines

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products be included in the machines. MIT's Medical Department has always handled condom sales at the birth control center, according to David E. Bailey, chief pharmacist at the Medical Department.

However, compared to the number of birth control pills sold, sales of condoms have been very low — only about 140 per week. "We don't sell as many as I think we should," Bailey noted.

He suggested that so few condoms are sold because people might feel it is embarrassing to buy them at the pharmacy; might not know that the pharmacy sells condoms, or might think it is inconvenient to go all the way to the Medical Department.

The presence of condom vending machines in discreet places in the dormitories would give students much easier access to condoms and fewer inhibitions about buying them, Bailey noted.

Gauging student reaction

The Housing Office is installing the machines in only three dormitories presently in order to gauge the student reactions toward the machines and to measure the demand for condoms.

"In one word, the issue is 'acceptance,' " Hagerty said. Selling condoms in dormitories is a new idea, and MIT is not absolutely sure how students will react. Groups from the Medical Department will hold discussions with dormitory residents to gather student opinions.

Hagerty said he expects a positive reaction. "Other houses want to get ahead [with installation of the machines]." So far there have been few complaints about the plan, he said.

Whitman also expected students to react favorably to the machines. It seems like a good idea, and "I don't think it's offensive," she said.

But she cautioned that "it's a little hard to tell right now" what the student reaction at East Campus will be, adding that word has only begun to spread about the installation of the machines.

At Ashdown, the initial reaction has been positive.

"Our concern was that with the AIDS epidemic, we really had an obligation to support something that might help," said Scott B. Smith, chairman of the Ashdown Executive Committee. Smith said he expects students will handle the situation well.

"We are all grown-ups," he said. Last year, before the Institute-wide plan was announced, 300 Memorial Drive had considered installing condom machines on its own. However, many people objected to the house spending its own money on the project, according to Joseph M. Mullally '89, 500 Memorial Drive president.

Now that MIT has put forward its own plan, support for the machines is high. "We're ready for them [the machines],... the students are enthusiastic," said George E. Hosker, 500 Memorial Drive house manager.

AIDS education

Bailey stressed that the Institute, by making condom purchases easier, is not suggesting that condoms are a panacea for AIDS. There have been some studies suggesting condoms reduce the spread of the disease, but "there are no iron-clad guarantees," he said.

Bailey's sentiments were echoed by Borivoje B. Mikic '87, housemaster at 500 Memorial Drive. These machines are only one part of the "big picture" in the fight against AIDS.

Condoms are not the complete answer to the problem, nor are they even the best method, Mikic said. More important than condoms is education, he continued.

Before and after installation of the machines, a group from the Medical Department will visit the dormitories to discuss with students the various methods of AIDS prevention, according to Janet H. Van Ness, director of the Health Education Service.

One of the primary purposes is to dissuade students of the notion that condoms alone will solve the AIDS problem, Van Ness said. "Condoms are a big help, but they are not the answer."

Condoms are not suitable for every form of sexual activity. Van Ness continued, and they can break. Also, there are many ways to catch the disease which do not involve sexual activity.

How the Medical Department will approach various dormitories has not yet been decided. A lot of people are not really concerned about AIDS and may not be willing to come to a seminar or discussion group, Van Ness noted.

"I'm not sure myself if [with the current round of AIDS publicity] a lot more people are using condoms," she added.

Van Ness noted that people cannot be "force-fed" health information and the Medical Department can only try to spread as much information as possible.

Next week is AIDS Awareness Week in Massachusetts and several high-profile events are planned, she said.

Van Ness also rebutted the "notion that the presence of condoms implies that the institution believes everyone at MIT is sexually active." Nor did she think condoms would encourage increased sexual activity.

"Machines supplied at no cost"

The machines belong to Pro-Tekt, a company in Boston. Pro-Tekt is supplying the first six machines at no cost to MIT. The company will also maintain the machines and collect all money. When the program is expanded to include all the dormitories, other arrangements may be worked out, Hagerty said.

MIT had some difficulty in locating a company to supply the machines, Hagerty said. Vending machine companies tend to be rather specialized — focusing on food machines, self-drink machines, etc.

Pro-Tekt was chosen because it was ready to install the machines right away, at no cost. If Pro-Tekt finds, after installation of the first machines, that demand is very low and the venture is unprofitable, it has the right to pull out, Hagerty said.

Bailey described the condoms that will be in the machines as "generic" — not a brand name.

They are produced by Circle Rubber Company, are individual wrapped, and will cost 75 cents. Right now, there are no plans to place condom machines in independent living groups or non-dormitory Institute buildings.

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