And Now the World Faces a Condom Shortage Because of COVID-19

The largest manufacturer makes one out of five condoms globally. It had to shut down production.

April 1, 2020 By Trent Straube

Amid all the directives to practice social distancing by staying six feet away from others arrives the news that the global demand for condoms is skyrocketing—and the world might soon run out of them or at least face a huge price increase. As Reuters reports, the shortage could occur because a major condom manufacturer was forced to shut down to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, which can lead to the fatal lung disease COVID-19.

Malaysia's Karex operates three factories that combined make one out of every five condoms in the world. In fact, the company produces about 5 billion condoms a year and ships them to over 140 countries, according to Bloomberg. Karex supplies brands including Durex and provides condoms used by health care systems and government programs, including the National Health Service in Britain and the United Nations Population Fund.

The good news is that Malaysia's government allowed the factories to restart production last week—but with only half the workforce.

International shipping presents another obstacle in the condom supply. Efforts to stem the spread of the new coronavirus have limited plane flights and even closed borders.

"I would definitely say this is an unprecedented stage; we have never seen such a disruption," Goh Miah Kiat, the group chief executive officer at Karex, told Bloomberg. Goh added that this is happening just as the demand for condoms is growing in the double digits. People across the globe who have been told to stay home want to practice family planning, he explained, especially because they want to avoid having children in such uncertain times.

"We are going to see a global shortage of condoms everywhere, which is going to be scary," Goh told Reuters. "My concern is that for a lot of humanitarian programs deep down in Africa, the shortage will not just be two weeks or a month. That shortage can run into months."

Reuters reached out to a Durex spokesperson who said the company wasn't experiencing a shortage of supplies.

In related news, the Capital City AIDS Fund in California is committed to helping people stay safe while having sex. To learn how, see “Protecting Your Sexual Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

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