or who reported that their partner had had sex with other women in the past year use condoms. Thus, increasing sexually active women’s and men’s protection against STDs, including HIV, through condom use remains a public health priority.

Women’s reasons for using the condom may be inferred from the characteristics of users. Use is highest among method users who are young, who are not married or cohabiting, and who recently have had more than one partner—i.e., those at greatest risk of contracting STDs. Further, condom use increases more steeply among adolescents and women not in a union than it does among other women. Those who use condoms in addition to a systemic (and therefore highly effective) contraceptive method are especially likely to be concerned about preventing STDs as well as pregnancy. While such women represent a minority of condom users, they are more likely than those using the condom alone to be young and unmarried and to have been in a relationship for less than six months.

It is striking that most condom use, and most of the increase in condom use, involves the condom alone rather than dual method use. On the one hand, this finding may reflect growing comfort and confidence in using condoms effectively. Conversely, it may also reflect difficulties in using two methods. If the other method is nonsystemic, such as spermicide or periodic abstinence, it and the condom can be used together to boost potential effectiveness or in alternation. In this case, though, there is less need to consider whether the condom is providing pregnancy prevention or STD prevention. The low level of dual method use (condoms along with systemic contraceptives) raises questions about how clearly messages about condom use are getting through to women who use these methods, and how receptive and able they are to have their partner use a condom when they are using a highly effective contraceptive method. More work is needed to guide potential users in how best to integrate dual method use.

It is astounding that in a time of sophisticated technological advancement, couples are increasingly turning to one of the oldest available methods. The condom fell out of favor with many users when methods that women could use, primarily the oral contraceptive, became available. To some extent, this represented not only a change in contraceptive control from men to women, but also perhaps a decrease in the need to acknowledge and discuss contraception within a relationship, since the pill can be used away from the time of intercourse.

The recent increase in condom use was undoubtedly spurred by concerns about HIV and other STDs, which tend to put women and men in positions of mistrust, or even opposition. However, these concerns may ultimately increase acknowl-