

What's Up with Nonoxynol-9?

I heard that Nonoxynol-9, the chemical used in over-the-counter birth control products, is dangerous. Is that true?

In 2000, researchers demonstrated conclusively that Nonoxynol-9 (N-9) was not effective in reducing HIV risk. N-9 products are sold over the counter as contraceptive spermicides, not for the prevention of HIV or other infections. Since N-9 kills HIV in a test tube, research was undertaken in the last decade to see if these products would also work for HIV prevention.

The 2000 study data showed that Advantage S, a low-dose N-9 gel, did not protect women from HIV infection. In fact, when used many times a day, Advantage S may actually increase HIV risk slightly by irritating vaginal membranes and causing disruptions that make it easier for virus to enter the blood stream. Other studies have shown that it can also irritate rectal membranes.

Does this mean that people shouldn't be using N-9 products at all?

In October 2001, the World Health Organization (WHO) held a consultation on N-9 with researchers from around the world. These experts came to the following conclusions:

- N-9 is not effective at preventing the transmission of HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases (STD). It shouldn't be used or promoted for disease prevention.
- N-9 (used alone or with a diaphragm or cervical cap) offers an important birth control option for some women. But N-9 may also increase a woman's chances of getting infected if she is exposed to HIV. So women at risk of HIV, especially those having sex multiple times a day, shouldn't use N-9 for birth control.

- Women who have low or no risk of HIV can continue to use N-9 for birth control purposes safely.
- Products with N-9 -- including condoms, lubes and birth control products -- should never be used for anal sex. The rectum is more fragile than the vagina. Even the small amount of N-9 in condoms and lubes can damage the rectum, raising HIV risk.
- Condoms with N-9 provide no more protection against pregnancy or infection than plain lubricated condoms. Since N-9 condoms may cause irritation, they should not be promoted for any purpose.

What does this say about the feasibility of microbicides?

Microbicides (mi- KRO'- bi-sidz) are products designed to be used vaginally or rectally to reduce the risk of getting infected with HIV and possibly other STDs. They are being formulated as gels, creams, suppositories, etc. **No approved microbicides are yet available.** But 60 potential microbicides are in the research pipeline and about 30 of them are in, or ready for, human testing.

Unfortunately, the failure of N-9 has given some people the impression that developing a safe, effective microbicide is impossible. That isn't true! Scientists are confident that microbicides can be developed. But N-9 is not one of them.

Right now, the National Institutes of Health spends only 2% of its AIDS research budget on microbicide research. This investment urgently needs to be increased.

With adequate funding, an effective microbicide could be on the market within 5-7 years. It would provide a life-saving alternative to people who can't insist on condom use, a valuable back-up method in case of condom failure and a much-needed boost, in the form of a new tool, for ongoing STD and HIV prevention efforts.

Global Campaign for Microbicides.
October 2002.



New research has proven that N-9 does *not* prevent HIV or STD transmission. Both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) put out guidance cautioning against using N9 for disease prevention -- and especially cautioning against rectal use.

On September 26, a broad-based coalition of over 85 leading scientists and health groups issued a public statement calling upon condom and lubricant manufacturers to voluntarily remove N-9 from their products. Spearheaded by the Global Campaign for Microbicides, Call organizers have been in dialogue with the condom and lubricant manufacturers about this since June. ***All major lubricant manufacturers have now agreed to put public health above profits and to stop adding N-9 to the sexual lubricants they produce.*** While lubricants containing N-9 may still be on your shelves, new stock you receive in coming months should not have it.

Several condom manufacturers also responded by stopping production of condoms with N-9. Among these are: Planned Parenthood, Johnson & Johnson's condom-producing subsidiary in Brazil and Mayer Laboratories--distributor of Maxx and Kimono condoms. Unfortunately, the top three condom manufacturers—Ansell Ltd., maker of Lifestyles condoms; Church & Dwight Company, maker of Trojan; and SSL International PLC, the parent company of Durex—have resisted, arguing that N-9 on condoms provides women with back-up protection against pregnancy in case of condom failure.

The companies, however, have no data to substantiate that claim. The WHO consensus report, available at <http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/rtis/nonoxynol9.html> concludes, “There is no evidence that N-9-lubricated condoms provide any additional protection against pregnancy or STDs compared with condoms lubricated with other products. Since adverse effects due to the addition of N-9 to condoms cannot be excluded, such condoms should no longer be promoted.”

Please note: we are NOT disputing the effectiveness of regular, lubricated condoms. Condoms alone are a very effective form of pregnancy and disease prevention and we applaud you for selling them. **We are also NOT calling for the removal of contraceptive foams, crèmes and other products designed specifically for vaginal use,** as these remain an important birth control option for women at low risk of HIV infection or other STDs.

Send a letter to your local retailer encouraging them to stop selling condoms and lubricants containing N-9 today!

For more information, contact the Global Campaign for Microbicides at www.global-campaign.org or contact Sanford Gaylord at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, 312-922-2322 or sgaylord@aidschicago.org.

To *(Name of Retailer)*:

Did you know that the some of the condoms and sexual lubricants on your shelves -- those containing Nonoxynol-9 -- may actually be increasing your customers' risk of HIV infection?

As a customer, here's what I am asking you to do:

- 1. Read the Fact Sheet on the safety of Nonoxynol-9 included in this letter.**
- 2. Remove the condoms and lubricants containing N-9 from your shelves now.** Some companies have agreed to replace returned stock with products without N-9.
- 3. Contact your Ansell, Church & Dwight and SSL International wholesalers and tell them that you are getting public pressure not to stock condoms coated with N-9.** Let these companies know that customers are objecting to the sale of these products because they pose a risk to the public health.

I urge you to voluntarily remove lubricants and condoms containing N-9 from your shelves now! For more information, contact the Global Campaign for Microbicides at www.global-campaign.org or contact Sanford Gaylord at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, 312-922-2322 or sgaylord@aidschicago.org.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Sign here