Waiting for Things to Gel

Now that studies show a vaginal microbicide can lower a woman's risk of contracting HIV, when exactly can we get a prescription?

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It might be awhile before these gels are available, says Tim Horn, president and editor-in-chief of AIDSmeds.com. "Though efficacy is a key variable that's important to drug approval agencies, so too is safety. We need to know more about problematic effects of promising microbicides, including the risk of drug resistance in women who do contract HIV."

Since researchers announced their groundbreaking study results (a gel containing a drug that fights HIV reduced male-to-female HIV transmission 39 percent) at the XVIII International AIDS Conference in Vienna this summer, they've been unable to raise the $100 million needed to continue the research.

"Conducting very large clinical trials costs hundreds of millions of dollars," Horn says. "Researchers need to keep working closely with HIV prevention activists to ensure that current streams of funding are at least maintained. It may also be necessary to increase pressure on pharmaceutical companies producing the drugs being used in microbicides."

And should microbicides get approved for manufacture, companies will need time to construct marketing campaigns to make consumers want to use these gels. Plus, gel makers will have to find ways to meet many real-world adherence challenges. Until then, the lube won't be in the tube anytime soon.

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