

Microbicides: Take Action

For this New Hope for HIV Prevention

HIV is a serious and growing women's health issue globally. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 61 percent of all adults living with HIV are women, and the number of women and girls infected with HIV has increased in every region of the world, with rates rising particularly rapidly in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

Biologically, women are two to four times more vulnerable than men to sexually transmitted HIV infection. Their vulnerability increases due to their lack of economic and social power in many societies, where women often cannot control sexual encounters or insist on protective measures such as abstinence or mutual monogamy. Many women who get infected with HIV have only one partner – their husbands. This trend is lethal to women, devastating to families and puts children at risk. Women need HIV prevention tools that they can control to safeguard their health and that of their families and communities. One of the most promising prevention tools is microbicides. Once developed, microbicides and vaccines would serve as complementary prevention technologies, with microbicides putting the power of prevention directly in women's hands

What are microbicides? (mī-KRO'-bī-sīdz)

Microbicides are a new type of product being developed that people could use vaginally or rectally to protect themselves from HIV and possibly other sexually transmitted infections. A microbicide could be produced in many forms: a gel, cream, sponge, or intra-vaginal ring that could be used for months at a time.

Why do we need Microbicides?

With 6,800 new HIV infections occurring globally each day, new prevention strategies are desperately needed. While microbicides are not a magic bullet, researchers believe they could prevent millions of infections. And with leading scientists concluding that a vaccine is likely to be at least 10 years away, we need to make a strong commitment to developing microbicides. Scientists estimate that even a 60 percent effective microbicide could prevent 2.5 million HIV infections in three years among women, men and children in the developing world

When will microbicides be ready to use?

It is impossible to say how long it will take to find a microbicide that is both safe and effective. On average, new drug development takes over a decade from discovery in a research lab to availability on the market. Ninety percent of candidates that enter preclinical testing are rejected before they enter clinical trials. Only a few microbicide candidates are in the last stages of testing to determine whether they are effective (which can take up to 4 years). We do

not know yet whether these candidates will work. If a trial shows that a microbicide does work, at least another two to four years will be required for individual countries to go through their own regulatory and manufacturing processes to make the microbicide available. Due to these individual country processes, it must be noted that a microbicide will not be available in all countries at the same time and not all people within a country will get it at the same time. It is likely to be made available to some women and not others during introduction and scale-up.

Why is public investment needed?

Microbicides are a public health good – a product offering huge social benefits but for which economic incentives to private investment are low. Despite the potential market size, neither large pharmaceutical companies nor major biotech companies have made significant financial investments in the field because development is costly and the likelihood of finding an effective product is unknown. Like other public health goods, such as vaccines, public funding must fill the gap left by market failure. As with any pharmaceutical or health care product, the key to developing safe, effective, affordable and accessible microbicides is sufficient investment. If we are to realise the promise of microbicides and the lifesaving properties they may provide, then Additional public funding must be made available for research and development.



How can you help?

Since microbicide research depends on government leadership and investment, public support is vital. Through the Global Campaign for Microbicides, people around the world are working in their own communities to demand safe and effective user-initiated HIV prevention tools. There are several things you, and your organisation, can do starting today to help make microbicides a reality:

- Join your local campaign. Go to www.global-campaign.org/regionalactivities.htm to find out if there is a microbicides coalition in your country or region.
- Sign up for our monthly e-newsletter, GC News. Sign up to receive our monthly e-newsletter and find additional information: www.global-campaign.org/gcnews.htm
- Host a talk on microbicides. Urge community groups, organisations and service providers in your community to host a free introduction to microbicides. We are happy to work with you on organising those programmes and finding presenters for you. Short presentations and scripts are also available at www.global-campaign.org/download.htm
- Sign the GC petition and help collect signatures. You can obtain a copy at www.global-campaign.org/download.htm
- Learn more about microbicides. Visit the Global Campaign website to read more about the economics, science, and advocacy for microbicides and other female initiated HIV prevention options.
- Host a launch of our film. You can order our film, In Women's Hands, for a small fee at www.global-campaign.org/film.htm
- Talk to your legislators about microbicides. Write, email, call, or visit your members of Parliament or legislators and ask them to support microbicide research and development. Learn more at www.global-campaign.org/legislativeadvocacy.htm
- Endorse the Global Campaign. Currently, currently over 350 endorsers organisations worldwide are working together under the Global Campaign umbrella. There are no fees involved in endorsing or participating in the Campaign. In fact, the Campaign can supply you with training, materials and speakers at no cost to help you educate your community about microbicides.

GCM is a diverse network of advocates and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) working to expand HIV prevention options and encourage ethical research that involves civil society.
Visit our website: www.global-campaign.org or email: info@global-campaign.org

Canada

Kenya

South Africa

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United States