



Global Campaign News
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Special Issue on N-9

Welcome to the biweekly *Global Campaign News*! The *Global Campaign News* is a forum for international exchange on microbicide activities and information with an aim to build a more informed and integrated movement for microbicide development and other prevention options against HIV and STDs.

We welcome your input and contributions. Correspondence can be addressed to info@global-campaign.org. If you would like to unsubscribe to the Global Campaign News, please reply to this e-mail with the subject line: UNSUBSCRIBE.

Key Lubricant and Condom Manufacturers Agree to Remove N-9 Pressure mounts on the "big-three" condom companies to comply

On September 26, the Global Campaign for Microbicides held a press conference to launch the "Call to Discontinue Nonoxynol-9 for Rectal Use." N-9 is the active ingredient in over-the-counter contraceptive products sold in the US and elsewhere and is added in smaller amounts to some sexual lubricants and to the outer surface of some condoms. Endorsed by 61 organizations and 27 scientists to date, the Call was developed to address the fact that many individuals are still seeking out and using lubricants and condoms containing Nonoxynol-9 in the mistaken belief that they offer added protection against HIV and STDs. In fact, these products may increase the user's risk of infection.

In development over the last four months, the Call makes four demands. It urges:

- manufacturers of condoms and sexual lubricants that contain Nonoxynol-9 to stop adding N-9 to their products.
- retail outlets to discontinue stocking these products.
- public health establishments, service providers and advocates to use every means at their disposal to get the message to consumers that N-9 does not help prevent HIV or STDs and should NOT be used rectally.
- re-doubled efforts to develop products that can (unlike N-9) be used safely and effectively in both the vagina and rectum to help prevent HIV infection

As a result of the Campaign, every major manufacturer of N-9-containing lubricants in the United States has agreed to re-formulate their products.

In May, the World Health organization (WHO) issued a Consensus Statement declaring that research now shows definitively that N-9 does not prevent HIV or STD transmission.

The WHO statement notes that Nonoxynol-9 is still safe for use as a contraceptive by women who are not at risk of HIV infection. But guidance issued by both WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) agree that N-9 should not be recommended for HIV prevention and specifically cautioned against rectal use of N-9.

The Global Campaign initiated the Call because this important information was not reaching those who need it most. "We are especially concerned about individuals who are using N-9 containing products rectally," notes Lori Heise, Director of the Global Campaign. "Even very small doses of N-9 have been shown to cause massive, short-term disruption and shedding of the cells lining the rectum, leading to increased risk of HIV infection." Since 42% of all condoms sold in the United States are lubricated with Nonoxynol-9, and 41% of gay men in a recent survey said that they had "actively sought out" lubricants containing the substance, the concern is well-founded.

"Scientists, public health officials, industry and activists all have an obligation to act when new data become available that challenge past beliefs about the safety and effectiveness of existing drugs like Nonoxynol-9" Heise added. "We all thought we were doing something helpful by promoting N-9 use in conjunction with condoms. But now we know better. It's time to correct the misinformation on this issue and eliminate the public health risk it has generated. "

The Call has already received impressive support from public health, family planning, AIDS and women's health organizations around the world, and new endorsers are signing on daily. The list currently includes amfAR, Gay & Lesbian Medical Association, National Women's Health Network, National AIDS Trust, UK, Aids Action, Association of Reproductive Health Professionals, Planned Parenthood Federation, Australian Federation of AIDS Organizations, Gay Men's Health Crisis and the Terrence Higgins Trust. For the complete list, go to www.global-campaign.org and click on the blue N-9 box).

It has also had substantial impact on the targeted manufacturers, all of whom also sell versions of their products without N-9. Since June, organizers of the Call have been initiating conversations with the manufacturers and asking that they voluntarily remove N-9 from their products.

Thus far, at least six condom and lubricant manufacturers--including Johnson and Johnson, Mayer Laboratories, Inc., and Planned Parenthood Federation of America--have agreed to the coalition's request. But the three largest condom manufacturers--Ansell Ltd., Church and Dwight Company, Inc., and SSL International plc-- do not plan to discontinue N-9 use. They argue that N-9 provides back-up protection against pregnancy if a condom breaks. Instead of removing the N-9, they plan to work with the FDA to improve condom labeling and may add language indicating that N-9 condoms are "for vaginal use only".

But, observes Dr. Felicia Stewart, Chair of the Board of the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals, "Condoms alone are a very effective form of pregnancy and disease

prevention. Adding N-9 just increases risk for rectal users, while providing no clear benefit in terms of pregnancy prevention if the condom breaks."

Whether a labeling change alone can effectively discourage rectal use remains to be seen. "The belief that N-9 helps prevent HIV is deeply entrenched and it would take years and a massive public education campaign to set the record straight," said Heise. "The most prudent thing to do is to eliminate the risk by removing N-9 from lubricants and condoms now."

As the debate is engaged nationally, health advocates in some communities are also weighing in at the local level. After the Bay Area Reporter (BAR), a weekly San Francisco paper, published a series of articles on the risk posed by N-9 on condoms and lubricants, San Francisco Supervisor Mark Leno called for a citywide ban against the sale of all sexual lubricants containing N-9, describing them as "a catalyst for (HIV) infection ... a danger to public health."

BAR reporter Ed Walsh is adding to the heat in San Francisco by questioning stores in city's Castro district about their sale of N-9 lubricants and publishing their responses. By spotlighting the issue and raising public awareness, Walsh and his readers have succeeded in persuading several storeowners to consider pulling the N-9 condoms and lubricants off their shelves.

"This is a great example of people taking the microbicides message and translating it into local action, declared Global Campaign Field Organizer Anna Forbes. "We know that safe, effective microbicides can be developed. But we also know that N-9 is not one of them," she said, adding that she hoped San Francisco's advocacy efforts would be replicated elsewhere -- store by store and community by community.

Recognizing N-9 contraceptives as an important birth control option than can be safely used by women who are not at risk of HIV, Call endorsers are not advocating the removal of these vaginal contraceptives from the market. They are, however, underscoring the urgent need for accelerated investment in microbicide research and development so that real microbicides -- disease prevention products that are safe and effective for vaginal and rectal use -- can be brought to market as quickly as possible.

For more information, please see www.global-campaign.org and click on the blue N-9 box for access to the Call and supporting documents. A PowerPoint presentation on N-9 (slides and script) has also been created by the Global Campaign and is available for downloading. The PowerPoint (which can be easily copied onto slides or overheads and comes with a sample script) provides a good overview of the history, our position, and research to date on N-9. |

Companies Agreeing to Remove N-9:

- Mayer Laboratories
Aqua Lube Plus

Kimono Condoms

Maxx Condoms

- Johnson & Johnson
KY Plus
N-9 lubricated condoms distributed in Latin America
- Planned Parenthood
Planned Parenthood Condoms w/N-9
- IPPF European Network
Condoms made by Enet, a subsidiary company
- Trimensa
ForPlay Plus
- Bcummings Co.
Elbow Grease
- Westridge Laboratories
ID-Glide Plus

Companies Still Refusing to Remove N-9

- Ansell Ltd.,
Lifestyles Condoms
- Church and Dwight Company, Inc.
Trojan Condoms
- SSL International plc
Durex Condoms