

Some sex lubricants may help spread HIV

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Ari Bendersky, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network

SUMMARY: A recent report warns that using sexual lubricants containing a popular spermicide could increase the risk of HIV ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) infection.

A recent report from the World Health Organization ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) warns that using sexual lubricants containing a popular spermicide could increase the risk of HIV infection.

The WHO report said that using lube containing Nonoxynol-9 (N-9) during anal sex could lead to rectal inflammation and the shedding of cells lining the rectum, causing a much higher risk of contracting the AIDS ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) virus.

While N-9 helps to prevent pregnancy, it was once believed the spermicide also worked to block the spread of HIV. However, the WHO report, which was preceded by a similar study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) (CDC) in 2000, confirms the dangers associated with N-9 and anal sex.

"The only use where N-9 has been shown to be beneficial is as a spermicide, so there certainly is no role for N-9 products for gay men," said Dr. Kenneth Mayer, a professor of medicine and community health at Brown University and a former board member of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association. "But it is important for gay men to use other lubricants when they have anal sex, since condom failure is more common in non-lubricated sex."

Currently, no products like N-9 exist to block the spread of HIV. However, researchers are working to bring something to market that will work to hinder the AIDS virus from being passed so quickly and easily, according to Dr. Tim Farley of the World Health Organization.

"There is an urgent need to develop safe lubricants for rectal use," Farley told the [Gay.com/PlanetOut.com](#) Network. "Safe in this context means (the lubricant) does not damage the rectum." However, Farley cautioned against using lubricants for unprotected anal sex and urged that "a condom must always be used for rectal sex."

But not everyone who uses N-9 during anal sex uses a condom.

Many gay men who participate in barebacking, or anal sex without a condom, may currently be unaware of the N-9 lube risks. A study presented by the CDC at this year's International AIDS Conference in Barcelona, Spain, showed that even after receiving the warning about higher risk of HIV transmission, gay men in San Francisco continued to use lubricants with N-9 during anal sex.

According to the study, 41 percent of the men polled who used N-9 to assist in anal sex did not use a condom, thereby heightening the chance to pass along HIV.

The warnings by the WHO and CDC against Nonoxynol-9 are so strong that San Francisco city officials are urging a ban against the sale of all sexual lubricants containing N-9 within San Francisco city limits.

"People using lubricant containing Nonoxynol-9 are under the misconception that they reduce the risk of contracting HIV, when in fact it acts as a catalyst for infection," said San Francisco Supervisor Mark Leno, who is pushing for the ban. "N-9 lubricants are a danger to public health and should be banned as soon as possible."

Many popular sexual lubricants, including K-Y Plus, ID Glide Plus, Aqualube Plus and ForPlay Plus, still contain Nonoxynol-9. However, Trigg Laboratories, which manufactures WET Lubricants, recently removed N-9 from its products following the CDC and WHO warnings. Trigg Labs may just be the first of many companies pulling the spermicide.

In fact, the Global Campaign for Microbicides, a coalition comprising more than 25 individual scientists and 55 national and international organizations, including Planned Parenthood ([news - web sites](#)), Gay Men's Health Crisis, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR), is calling on manufacturers of condoms and lubricants containing N-9 to voluntarily remove it from their products. The coalition is not looking for an all-out ban on N-9, however -- only with products that may be used with anal sex.

"We are not calling for the removal of N-9 contraceptive products designed exclusively for vaginal use because they remain an important contraceptive option for women who are at low risk of HIV infection or other STDs," said Lori Heise, director of the Global Campaign for Microbicides. "Moreover, evidence suggests that N-9 is considerably more toxic at low doses when used in the rectum than the vagina."

Taking the appropriate measure to protect gay and bisexual men against increased exposure to HIV is a move some officials, including Leno, appreciate.

"We can't afford to wait to reclassify the study of this issue," Leno said. "The dangers of N-9 have been proved by CDC and WHO studies and, as public officials, our responsibility is to protect public health."