



## Global Campaign News April 12, 2002

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](mailto: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.

### ***In this issue:***

Cervical barrier methods -- another prevention option?  
Microbicides in Uganda  
*Vogue* Profiles Research, Development of Microbicides  
A Day of Hope in Washington, DC.  
Legislative Update  
Microbicides Reach Gay Community

### **Cervical barrier methods -- another prevention option?**

Women are physically more vulnerable to sexual transmission of HIV than men, due in part to the nature of the cervix. Unlike the vaginal epithelium (*surface*), which consists of several layers of flat, sturdy squamous cells, parts of the surface of the cervix are made up of a single layer of fragile columnar cells, which are more easily damaged. This is the cellular equivalent of a stack of sumo wrestlers versus a single line of figure skaters. In younger women, these cervical columnar cells are even more exposed than in adult women, probably a major factor in adolescent girls' higher risk. In addition, several target cells for HIV, including CD-4 cells, are found more frequently on the cervix than throughout the rest of the vagina. The passage of infectious fluids into the upper genital tract (also highly susceptible) via the cervix may be another factor in women's HIV acquisition. Other STDs besides HIV also target the cervix. The bacteria that cause gonorrhea and chlamydia, for example, can only replicate in the cervical epithelium, not in the squamous epithelium of the vagina.

Though the cervix is not the only factor in vaginal transmission of HIV or STDs, it is highly possible that a woman could reduce her risk by protecting her cervix. Cervical barrier methods include the diaphragm, cervical cap and, to a lesser extent, the contraceptive sponge. Developers are working on variations of these traditional methods that would make them easier to use. For example, PATH (Program for Appropriate Technology in Health) is designing a silicone alternative to the diaphragm. The device would be easier to insert and remove and would not require a health care provider for fitting. Lea's Shield, sold in Germany, is a silicone cup barrier with a loop for removal.

FemCap and the Oves Cap are silicone variations of the current latex cervical cap. Contraceptive sponges, though not completely impermeable barriers, deliver and release spermicide at the cervix and provide some physical coverage. Two sponges, Protectaid and Pharmatex, are available in Canada and Europe. The Today sponge is expected back on the market in the US shortly.

The Contraceptive Research and Development Program of USAID (CONRAD) is supporting studies to demonstrate that some of these devices are equivalent to those currently approved by the FDA for contraceptive efficacy. However, no studies have been published that specifically tested whether cervical barrier methods can reduce the risk of HIV transmission, though observational studies have shown an association between cervical barrier use and reduced risk of other STDs. More research is needed to determine whether cervical barrier devices, used either alone or with a microbicide, could protect women from these devastating diseases. This research should be a priority component within our HIV prevention portfolio.

### **Microbicides in Uganda**

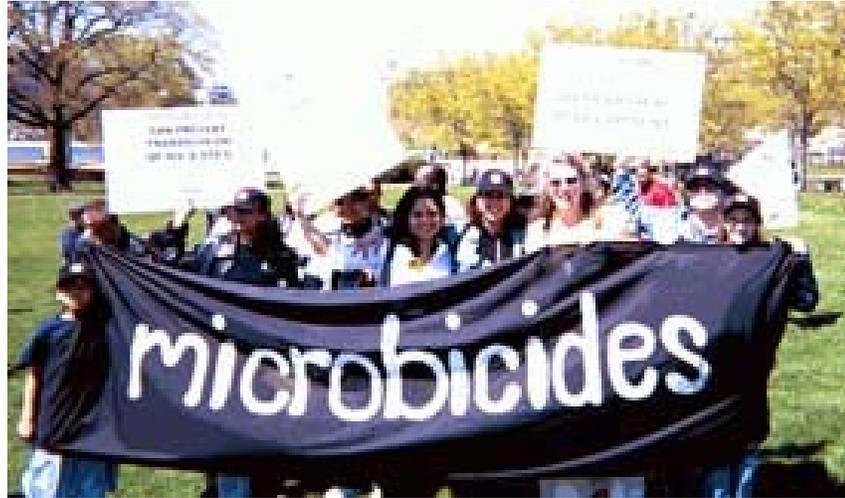
Thanks to journalist, Barbara Bitangaro, for writing the article, "Gel to Protect Women Against HIV/AIDS Virus" where she interviews the Global Campaign. The article was featured in *New Visions*, a newspaper that reaches thousands of readers in Uganda. She writes, "Even in Uganda, females have a higher chance of acquiring HIV. The HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, June 2001 by Ministry of Health states, "A cumulative total of 53,879 adult cases are presented in this report. Of the 52,986 with sex recorded, 24,199 (45.7%) were males while 28,787 (54.3%) were females... The male to female ratio is approximately 1:1.5." For the full article, click [here](#).

### **Vogue Profiles Research, Development of Microbicides**

The April issue of *Vogue* profiles a new microbicide currently in development called Savvy, which is designed to prevent pregnancy and the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Savvy, which is being developed by the biotech firm Biosyn Inc., will enter large-scale human clinical trials next year. The microbicide, which acts as a "lubricant, spermicide and germ-killer in one," works by disrupting a virus' outer envelope so that it cannot replicate or attach itself to healthy cells, thus preventing infection. Animal testing and small human trials have shown Savvy to be effective in preventing pregnancy and transmission of HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea and herpes. According to Lori Heise, director of the Global Campaign for Microbicides, products such as Savvy "have the same potential to transform the landscape of sexuality that the [birth control] pill had" four decades ago. The introduction of oral contraceptives allowed women to "reclai[m] the sexual experience from the fear of pregnancy," Heise stated, but the fear of HIV and STD transmission remains, and the use of male condoms does not allow women to be in control of their own safety. Microbicides, however, much like birth control pills, are products that "a woman could use without her partner's consent or even knowledge." See more [here](#).

## **Advocates in Action: A Day of Hope in Washington, DC**

Microbicide activists put in an enthusiastic appearance at the national "Day of Hope: Fight AIDS in Africa" demonstration and lobby day in Washington, DC on April 10th. The



event, sponsored by a wide range of organizations including the Global Campaign for Microbicides, was held to demand immediate increases in money from Congress for affordable AIDS treatment and prevention and debt cancellation for countries hardest hit by AIDS.

Nine microbicide advocates boarded a bus in New York at dawn to make the trip to DC where they were joined on Capital Hill by four Global Campaign for Microbicides staffers equipped with 400 flyers in support of the Microbicides Development Act.

Throughout the program, featuring speeches by actor Danny Glover, Rep. Barbara Lee (D, CA) and Rep. James Leach (R, IA), our advocates distributed the flyers and buttons and attracted multiple press interviews with a banner and catchy posters. New York advocate Juanita Williams provided Mr. Glover with a copy of the flyer and other informational materials and spoke with him briefly about the issue. The advocates also walked the halls of Congress after the rally and met with legislative staff to discuss the urgent need for increased federal spending on microbicides.

Many thanks and congratulations to the women of SMART University in New York and their children who took the time to make microbicides a visible and vital part of this important action: Julyssa Aponte, Juanita Williams, Petra Berrios, Lina Rivera, Anais Rivera, Christina Rodriguez, Joseph Rodriguez, Samantha Rodriguez and, leading the whole delegation with incredible energy and commitment, Susan Rodriguez. Many thanks also to Elizabeth Meixell of New York for making the dramatic banner.

## **Legislative Update**

Microbicide advocates in the US have been turning up the heat on their Representatives and Senators for the last three months urging them to co-sponsor the Microbicides Development Act now pending in the US Congress. These efforts are bearing fruit. In February and March, two more Senators and a dozen more Representatives signed on as co-sponsors of the legislation. Credit for generating five of these additional signers goes to the Illinois Global Campaign Site. According to Illinois Coordinator Grisel Robles, sign-on postcards serve as the site's primary mechanism for mobilizing constituent

pressure on this issue. "Illinois voters have signed and sent at least 150 postcards to Congress already," said Robles, "and more are going in the mail every day." In addition, the Connecticut and southern California Sites' efforts have also generated new co-sponsors in 2002 and both the Pennsylvania and Georgia sites have verbal commitments from Representatives.

### **Microbicides Reach Gay Community**

US advocates have made efforts to engage the gay men's health community in microbicide advocacy. All over the US, advocates have made microbicides presentations at regional Gay Men's Health Summits. A microbicides workshop will also be held at the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Health Summit in Boulder, Colorado this August. Finally, US Global Campaign coordinator Anna Forbes' article, "[Demanding Microbicides: A Chemical Condom in Your Future?](#)" was featured on [gayhealth.com](http://gayhealth.com), a website that estimates receiving approximately 250,000 viewers per month.