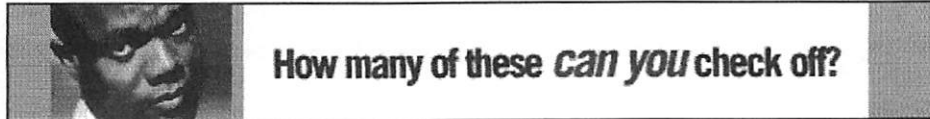


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USA TODAY Health

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Spermicide N-9 said to multiply risk of AIDS

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By Steve Sternberg, USA TODAY

DURBAN, South Africa — Women who faithfully use the spermicide nonoxynol-9 (N-9) to safeguard themselves from HIV nearly tripled their risk of infection with the AIDS virus, researchers said Wednesday.

The results, from a study of nearly 1,000 women, alarmed officials and prompted some to warn women not to use the spermicide if there is a chance that a partner is HIV-positive.

"I think this may be the end of N-9 as a possible microbicide," said lead researcher Lut Van Damme of the Institute of Tropical Diseases in Antwerp.

"You might be wasting your money, and you might be wasting your life," said Joseph Pierrens of UNAIDS, chief sponsor of the \$3 million study reported at the 13th International AIDS Conference here.

Others, including an executive of the firm that makes the product, objected that the results might not be broadly relevant because the study participants were sex workers who often had many sexual encounters daily. N-9 is a kind of detergent that can irritate the skin and possibly open up a path for HIV to enter the body.

"It's a jump to say that it is unsafe with less frequent use," said Rodney Hoff of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Nevertheless, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention canceled a study of a product called Advantage S in Miami and Los Angeles after just 12 women had enrolled.

The new research deprives women of what doctors had hoped would be a convenient way to protect against AIDS.

Other than the female condom, which has not gained wide acceptance,

women have no way to protect themselves during intercourse if their partners refuse to use a condom.

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