

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT **MICROBICIDES**

### **Question: What is a microbicide?**

**Answer:** A microbicide is a vaginal gel that can prevent a woman from becoming infected with HIV through vaginal intercourse.

### **Question: Are microbicides currently available for HIV prevention?**

**Answer:** Not yet. However, a recent study (CAPRISA 004) showed that a microbicide containing an ARV (antiretroviral) called tenofovir, which is a drug used to treat people who are HIV+, can help protect an HIV-negative woman from becoming infected. If other studies show the same (or better) results, tenofovir gel may become available in the next few years.

### **Question: What do you mean by “can help protect”?**

**Answer:** In the study, the microbicide gel was 39% effective overall. For women who used the gel exactly as directed (using it for every occasion of vaginal intercourse, once within 12 hours before and once 12 hours after sex) the microbicide gel was 54% effective. Therefore, using the gel consistently was much better than using nothing, but was not as effective as always using male or female condoms.

### **Question: Would a microbicide eliminate the need for condoms?**

**Answer:** No. When used consistently and correctly, male or female condoms provide better protection against HIV and STIs than microbicide gels, so they will still be a preferred option. But for people who cannot or do not wish to use condoms, using microbicide gels can offer valuable protection against infection with HIV.

### **Question: Would a microbicide protect against all sexually transmitted infections (STI)?**

**Answer:** No. Because every STI is different, a microbicide gel would not necessarily protect against all infections. However, in the recent study of tenofovir gel, the microbicide also provided protection against Herpes simplex virus (HSV 2) infection.

**Question: Would microbicides be safe?** Any new product must go through rigorous safety testing before becoming available to consumers. In the recent study of tenofovir gel, women using the gel had no more side effects than women using the placebo gel. However, women were followed for 2 ½ years, so additional studies are needed to show the gel is safe over the long-term.

**Effectiveness and Safety of Tenofovir Gel, an Antiretroviral Microbicide, for the Prevention of HIV Infection in Women** Quarraisha Abdool Karim, *et al.* *Science* **329**, 1168 (2010); DOI: 10.1126/science.1193748

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT **PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PREP)**

### **Question: What is PrEP?**

**Answer:** PrEP (or pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a pill that contains ARVs (antiretrovirals), the same kind of drugs used to treat people who are HIV+. Recently, scientists have shown that taking this pill every day can help to protect HIV-negative women and men from getting infected with HIV through vaginal or anal sex.

### **Question: Is PrEP currently available?**

**Answer:** PrEP is still being tested among women and men. However, it should become available soon.

### **Question: What do you mean by “can help to protect”?**

**Answer:** In one study (Partners PrEP) of couples who were serodiscordant (where one person is HIV+ and one is HIV-), PrEP was 74% effective in preventing the HIV-negative partner from becoming infected. The study included couples where the woman was HIV+ and couples where the man was HIV+. This means that PrEP may not be as effective as using a male or female condom every time, but it is much better than using nothing at all.

### **Question: Does PrEP eliminate the need for other prevention methods?**

**Answer:** No. PrEP would simply add an additional prevention option. It would be most effective when combined with continued use of condoms as well as other prevention methods.

### **Question: Is PrEP safe?**

**Answer:** Any new product must go through rigorous safety testing before becoming available to consumers. In the recent studies of PrEP the rate of serious medical events was similar for those assigned to PrEP and those assigned to take a placebo. Additional studies will be needed to ensure that PrEP is safe over the long term.