



The Need for Microbicides

Current prevention options are not enough. Women and girls increasingly bear the burden of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with more than 15.4 million women now living with the disease across the globe. Being female, married and poor are often the most significant risk factors for acquiring the infection. The 'ABC' approach (Abstinence, Being faithful and using Condoms) has proven to be an impractical prevention method for many women.

Abstinence is unrealistic for married women and for those who face sexual aggression on a regular basis. Being faithful and using condoms, although effective, require the consent of a male partner, which in many cultures may not always be forthcoming. Furthermore, using condoms or abstaining prevents women from bearing children. For many women, particularly in resource-poor countries, their ability to bear children determines their status in society and within their marriage. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than six in 10 adults living with HIV in 2007 were women.¹

New prevention options that are female-initiated, such as vaginal microbicides, are urgently needed. Vaginal microbicides would give women a new way to protect themselves from HIV, one that would empower women to protect their own health. Microbicides would complement existing prevention strategies, such as abstinence, condoms, behaviour change, male circumcision and treatment of sexually transmitted infections as well as other potential methods such as oral prophylaxis and HIV vaccines.

Vaginal microbicides are products being developed to reduce the transmission of HIV to women during sexual intercourse. These products could take the form of vaginal gels, rings, tablets and films that would release the active ingredient gradually over time. Microbicides would attack the virus at multiple points in its life cycle, from the moment the virus enters the vagina during intercourse.

Several early-generation microbicide candidates remain in large-scale efficacy trials involving thousands of women in Africa. A newer generation of antiretroviral (ARV)-based microbicides is also being tested for safety and efficacy, and pre-clinical research on numerous other potential microbicide candidates is ongoing.

The microbicide field has a global constituency. Microbicide research and development is funded by many countries including Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States (the European Commission is also a funder).² Many countries also host microbicide trials, including Belgium, Dominican Republic, India, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Thailand, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the United States.³

July 2008

¹ UNAIDS/WHO "AIDS Epidemic Update: December 2007."

² HIV Vaccine and Microbicide Resource Tracking Working Group "Building a Comprehensive Response," Nov 2007.

³ Alliance for Microbicide Development "Microbicide Candidates in Ongoing Clinical Trials," April 2008.

IPM Headquarters

8401 Colesville Road, Suite 200
Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA
TEL +1-301-608-2221
FAX +1-301-608-2241

IPM Belgium

Rue du Trône, 98, 3rd floor
1050 Brussels, Belgium
TEL +32(0)2-507-1234
FAX +32(0)2-507-1222

IPM South Africa

PO Box 3460
Paarl 7620, South Africa
TEL +27-21-860-2300
FAX +27-21-860-2308/9

IPM CTM Facility

3894 Courtney Street, Suite 170
Bethlehem, PA 18017 USA
TEL +1-484-893-1050
FAX +1-484-893-1057

www.ipm-microbicides.org

