

**Title:** Sexual preferences and the acceptability of PRO 2000/5 microbicide gel, during a phase III trial, in Johannesburg.

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**Background & objectives:**

Johannesburg is one of several sites where the Microbicide Development Program is conducting an efficacy trial for PRO 2000/5 microbicide gel. Preferences for dry sex might negatively affect gel acceptability. This paper discusses the sexual preferences of trial participants and the effect of gel on vaginal lubrication.

**Methods:**

A sub set of women participating in the trial were randomly selected and asked to participate in in-depth interviews at weeks 4, 24 and 52 after enrolling in the trial. Their partners were also invited for an interview at similar intervals. Focus group discussions were conducted with trial participants and with community members. The interviews and discussions included issues of sexual practices and preferences, substances inserted vaginally, and gel preference and acceptability.

**Results:**

To date, 136 in-depth interviews have been conducted with trial participants and 15 with partners. Ten focus group discussions have been conducted with trial participants and another 10 with community members. None of the trial participants reported inserting substances vaginally, although they reported rumors that a few women insert substances to increase their partners' sexual pleasure. These substances absorb moisture or contract the vagina to increase friction. In contrast, women enrolled in the trial reported that vaginal lubrication was highly desirable as it facilitated penile penetration. Male and female participants highlighted the increased sexual pleasure after using the gel. The gel appeared to regulate vaginal wetness.

**Conclusions:**

These findings challenge the perceived preference for dry sex amongst South African men and the consequent popularity of vaginal drying substances. Therefore, the lubricating effect of the gel is unlikely in our research context to act as a barrier to acceptability.

300 words