The Latest on Lubes and Gel

May 2, 2011 By Laura Whitehorn

- A vaginal gel may also work as a form of HIV prevention for anal sex. The gel, a microbicide, contains an HIV drug (tenofovir, used in Atripla, Viread and Truvada). In large international trials, the gel gave women some vaginal protection against HIV (women using the gel were 39 percent less likely to contract HIV). The gel was hard on rectal tissue, but researchers are remaking it to fix that problem, aiming to produce a safe, effective anal microbicide for use by all sexes.

- When asked whether they'd choose an oral drug or a gel to prevent HIV, 72 percent of U.S. women said they'd rather swallow than smear.

- Buyer beware: Some lubes damage anal tissue and could make it easier to get HIV. Like the gel we mentioned before, some lubes seem to dry rectal cells or cause them to burst, damaging the tissue-thin protective layer. If used for anal sex without condoms, these gels could raise the risk of contracting HIV.

When choosing a lube for use without—or preferably with—a condom, consider avoiding those that contain polyquaternium. In studies, lubes containing this chemical caused the damage to the anal tissue.

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