N-9?

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Makers of sexual lube ended a 15-year controversy in October by agreeing to nix nonoxynol-9 (N-9) on the premise that, when it comes to HIV transmission, the damage it does to vaginal and rectal mucosal lining outweighs its spermicidal punch.

Why did the kabosh take so long? Partly because, although N-9's sperm-killing spunk in the lab nailed it as a no-brainer against HIV, prevention results in humans "were all over the map," says Anna Forbes of the Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM). But a recent study confirming that N-9 does a napalm number in the rectum's protective lining led more than 80 public-health poobahs (including Gay Men's Health Crisis and Planned Parenthood) to pressure lube 'n' latex makers to hold the N-9. Lube guys complied, but some rubber barons -- including Durex, Lifestyles and Trojan -- refused, contending that N-9 prevents pregnancy.

The next big thing? Gel microbicides, though they're far from approval. Test tube results look good, but, Forbes reminds, the proof is in the, er, pudding -- "filling up an applicator and shooting it up the butt."

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