Still Gellin’

April 1, 2010 By Laura Whitehorn

At the end of 2009, trial results for PRO 2000, a vaginal gel designed to keep women from contracting HIV, were announced—and they were disappointing. Rates of HIV infection were basically identical for women who used the gel as for those who did not.

Other news, however, suggests that there might still be hope for condomless sex, one day.

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh received two large grants (total value: nearly $20 million) to study and develop microbicide gels. Best of all, at least one gel will be designed and tested specifically for rectal use. That would be helpful for men who have sex with men, as well as for heterosexual couples who have anal sex.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)—when negative people take antiretroviral meds before exposure to HIV—worked well in mice that had been engineered to have human immune systems. The mice were exposed rectally or intravenously to very high levels of HIV. No mouse treated with PrEP became HIV positive, while 12 of 19 mice that hadn’t been PrEP’d did contract the virus.

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