# Food Additive Proves Useful in HIV Research

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Scientists at the University of Minnesota say they have found a way to block the transmission of simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), a virus closely related to HIV, in female macaque monkeys by using glycerol monolaurate (GML), a substance commonly used as a food additive, Minnesota Public Radio reports.

“It’s used in foods like ice cream and gravy. It’s in cosmetics as an emulsifying agent and as a mild antimicrobial agent. It’s also in breast milk, so it is a naturally occurring compound,” said Pat Schlievert, who has been studying GML in his university research lab since 1992.

Scientists inserted GML mixed with KY Warming Gel into the vagina of five rhesus macaques. Then scientists exposed the monkeys to large amounts of SIV. Two weeks later, the monkeys were tested and had not contracted the disease. Scientists repeated the process, and again none of the monkeys injected with GML acquired SIV; in contrast, four out of five monkeys in the control group contracted the virus.

Although scientists are enthusiastic about their findings, they warn people about reading too much into the results. Their study was small, and a few months after the project ended, one of the five SIV-negative monkeys developed the virus, indicating that more animal studies are needed before scientists can begin human testing. Researchers plan to explore whether the findings could apply to HIV infections contracted rectally and therefore reduce HIV transmission between men who have sex with men (MSM).

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