Scientists Zero In on Vaginal Bacteria Linked to HIV Risk

Previous studies have found that certain vaginal microbiome compositions are associated with greater HIV rates among women.

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Researchers are gaining a clearer sense of which types of vaginal bacteria are most associated with the risk of contracting HIV among women, MedPage Today reports.

Publishing their findings in The Lancet Infectious Diseases, researchers studied vaginal swab samples taken from 87 HIV-positive women and 262 HIV-negative control subjects. They conducted a genetic analysis to identify the vaginal bacteria most closely linked to HIV infection. Based on these findings, they established a subset of 55 HIV-positive and 55 HIV-negative women to study more closely.

The women with HIV had a greater level of diversity in the types of bacteria colonizing their vaginas than those who did not have the virus.

The researchers more closely analyzed 20 types of bacteria and found that seven were linked to HIV infection, with greater levels of these various bacteria increasing the risk. The bacteria that most strongly predicted HIV infection were Parvimonas type 1 and Gemella asaccharolytica. Both are common among those women with bacterial vaginosis, an inflammatory condition.

Findings from this study may eventually lead researchers to develop interventions that target the vaginal microbiome in order to lower the risk of HIV.

To read the MedPage Today article, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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