

## **Microbicides: A Female Controlled Prevention Tool**

**By Shalini Eddens and Bindya Gillenwater Patel (Global Campaign for Microbicides)**

Imagine a gel that a woman could use to help stop HIV. What if there was a cream that could protect your HIV-negative partner? Suppose you had a vaginal ring that would release a drug slowly to reduce the risk of re-infection. What if this gel or cream or ring could also prevent pregnancy – *or* let you get pregnant with reduced risk of infection?

People all over the world are not only imagining such a gel, cream, or ring, they are actually working to make them a reality. They are called Microbicides. Microbicides are products that, when applied topically, could prevent the transmission of HIV and other infections. **Microbicides are not available yet.** But once they are, they would be a women controlled prevention option. With enough money and support, microbicides – could be a reality in the next decade.

Scientists are currently testing dozens of products to figure out if they help protect against HIV and/or other STDs. Ten products are currently being tested in humans. If one of these products is found to be effective, we could see a microbicide available in a few countries by 2010.

### **Why should positive women care about microbicides?**

HIV-positive women are some of the most vocal advocates for microbicides for many reasons. Microbicides could help protect women from sexually transmitted and vaginal infections other than HIV, which is important for women living with HIV. Some of the microbicides under development may disable HIV in vaginal secretions and give HIV-positive women a way to help protect their partners who may not use condoms.

Some of the microbicides may also be contraceptive, while others will not. A non-contraceptive microbicide could protect your partner, but give positive women the option to become pregnant. A contraceptive microbicide with prevent STD/HIV transmission and pregnancy.

Women with living HIV may have different needs for, and responses to, various microbicide products. We need to make sure that positive women are involved in the testing of microbicides and that their concerns are addressed.

### **How can you get involved?**

Currently, there is a lack of support from the pharmaceutical industry, so funding for research is dependent on the government and philanthropic investment. However, barely 2% of the US budget for HIV/AIDS research – only two cents of every dollar -- is spent on efforts to find a safe, effective microbicide. *The more people we have demanding for a microbicide, the sooner we will see one.* In order for microbicides to be a higher priority, our leaders need to hear from voters that microbicides are important.

This year, on March 8, in recognition of International Women's Day, representatives introduced the Microbicides Development Act (MDA). If passed, the act will help ensure that the US government's commitment to microbicide research and development is increased substantially.

### **Has your senator or representative signed the bill?**

**To help make microbicides a reality, call or email your senators and representatives and ask them to co-sponsor the Microbicide Development Act!**

*To email*, go to [www.global-campaign.org](http://www.global-campaign.org) where you can find a ready-made letter to send or you can write your own.

*To call*, simply Find their phone number at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and leave a message as simple as: "I am calling to ask the Representative (or Senator) to sign on to the *Microbicide Development Act*. This bill can make a major difference in fighting AIDS globally."

Once you have made this call or sent that email, there are many other things you can do. The Global Campaign for Microbicides is a coalition of people and organizations from around the world working in their own communities to demand safe and effective user-controlled HIV prevention tools.

At the Global Campaign website ([www.global-campaign.org](http://www.global-campaign.org)), you can:

- Learn more about microbicides, clinical trials, the MDA Act
- Find out if there is a microbicides advocacy coalition in your city
- Download presentations, factsheets and papers on microbicides
- Sign up for our bi-weekly e-newsletter, GC News
- Get information to host a talk on microbicides
- Order our new film, *In Women's Hands*

The voices of women living with HIV, their families, friends and loved ones is crucial in getting a safe and effective microbicide in the hands of women around the world. Take a moment in your day to learn more about microbicides, tell a friend, a sister and aunt. Let's make microbicides a reality and put the power of prevention in women's hands!