

NONOXYNOL-9, HIV AND PREGNANCY

for women and their male partners

What is Nonoxynol-9? (pronounced non-ox-in-ol)

Nonoxynol-9 (N-9) is the chemical name for a sperm-killing ingredient used in spermicides. Spermicides were first developed as a birth control method. Many women who don't want to get pregnant use condoms along with spermicides. There are several forms of spermicides, most of which use N-9: contraceptive jelly, foam, sponge or Vaginal Contraceptive Film (VCF). They can all be purchased without a doctor's prescription at most drug stores. Spermicides are put into the vagina before intercourse. Some condoms also come lubricated with N-9.

Does N-9 prevent pregnancy?

Yes. Spermicides with N-9 are a good way to prevent pregnancy if combined with a latex condom.

Does N-9 prevent AIDS?

You may have heard or read that N-9 can help kill the HIV virus. A recent medical study showed that frequent use of N-9 may in fact increase a woman's risk of getting infected with HIV. N-9 can cause irritation in the vagina and the cervix. This irritation provides a route of entry for the HIV virus. A woman may not necessarily know that her vagina is irritated.

Does this mean we should not use spermicides?

It depends on how often you use spermicides and your HIV and pregnancy risks. A counsellor can help you with your decision.

Spermicides should not be used for anal or oral sex as irritation can occur.

What is the safest way to prevent pregnancy, HIV and STDS?

People have different contraceptive needs at different times in their lives. Speak with your doctor or a counsellor at a Sexual Health Clinic. The best protection for both partners against all sexually transmitted diseases including HIV is a latex condom.

What if we only have condoms with N-9?

A condom with N-9 is much better and safer than no condom at all. For the next time, your pharmacist, counsellor or sexual health clinic will be able to help you get condoms that do not have N-9. Check the package to make sure.

What else can help us have safer sex?

Men and women can use a water-based lubricant to help prevent condom breakage. Lubricant helps the condom feel better too. Water-based lubricant does not contain Nonoxynol-9.

What if the condom does break?

If the woman is not taking the birth control pill and the condom breaks, the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) can prevent pregnancy. It is important to take the pills within 72 hours. Men and women who think they may have been in unprotected contact with HIV should consult a clinic or doctor right away.

This fact sheet may help you and your partner make choices about the best ways for you to prevent pregnancy, HIV and STDs. A counsellor can help you too.

For free, confidential information about spermicides, safer sex, the emergency contraceptive pill and clinics in your area, call:



AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline
1-416-392-2437
(English and other languages)

Toll-free 1-800-668-2437
(English and other languages)

1-800-267-7432
(French)

