



Spermicide



Health Services Department, Public Health
Infectious Diseases Control Division

What are spermicides?

Spermicides contain chemicals that can kill sperm. They come in a variety of forms: vaginal foams, creams, jellies, tablets, suppositories, inserts or “films”.

How do you use spermicides?

The instructions for using different spermicides vary. Always read the instructions that come with the spermicide you use and check the expiry date. The instructions will explain when and how to put the spermicide in your vagina. Leave the spermicide in for six to eight hours following vaginal sex and do not swim, douche or take a tub bath during this time. You may shower. Spermicides are washed away with normal vaginal secretions.

NO MATTER WHAT FORM OF SPERMICIDE YOU USE, A NEW APPLICATION MUST BE PUT INTO YOUR VAGINA EACH TIME YOU HAVE VAGINAL SEX.

How well do spermicides work?

With typical use, out of 100 women using this method for one year, 21 will become pregnant. Using spermicides with other methods of birth control (such as a condom, diaphragm, cervical cap or sponge) will reduce the risk of pregnancy.

Recent studies have shown a potential increase in the spread of HIV with frequent spermicide use. This is likely due to irritation of the vaginal or penile tissues, making it easier for the HIV virus to enter your body.

Recommendations

Spermicides are not recommended for prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. They are best suited for couples in a monogamous relationship who have tested negative for STIs, including HIV.

Advantages

- you can buy spermicides in drugstores and variety stores
- you do not need to see a doctor to get spermicides
- you can use spermicides with other birth control methods
- the spermicide can be used inside a condom if the partner is sensitive to the chemicals
- a woman does not need the participation of a partner to use spermicides
- they can be used while breastfeeding
- you only use it when you need it

Disadvantages

- spermicides have a high failure rate if they are used without another method of birth control
- they must be applied/reapplied for each act of intercourse
- they may have an odour or unpleasant taste
- they may cause irritation to you or your partner
- if the skin on the genitals becomes irritated when using spermicides, you may be at higher risk for getting STIs
- some people find the different types of spermicides messy to use

To reduce the risk of pregnancy, it is essential that you use spermicides correctly. Please talk with your health care provider to ensure you are using your chosen method correctly.