

Spermicides

What are spermicides?

Spermicides are put in the vagina before sex to help prevent pregnancy. They contain an ingredient called nonoxynol-9 that kills sperm.



There are different kinds of spermicides:

- **Vaginal contraceptive film** – a small square of clear film that turns into a gel once it's inside the vagina.
- **Contraceptive foam** – comes in an aerosol can with an applicator.
- **Contraceptive inserts, tablets, or suppositories** – solid forms of spermicide that melt into a foam.
- **Spermicidal gel, jelly, and creams** – come in a tube with an applicator and can be used with a diaphragm or cervical cap. This type of spermicide can be hard to find because it is no longer made in Canada. Some people order it online or pick it up while travelling internationally.

Lactic acid buffering gels (e.g., Contragel®, Caya Gel®) can also be used with diaphragms but they are less effective at preventing pregnancy because they do not contain nonoxynol-9. Lactic acid buffering gel is different than the spermicides described in this handout.

How well do spermicides work?

- With **typical use** (not following the exact directions) spermicides are **72%** effective.
- With **perfect use** (following the exact directions all the time) spermicides are **82%** effective.
- Spermicides are better at preventing pregnancy when used with another type of birth control, such as condoms or diaphragms.
- Spermicides don't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV.

How do I use spermicides?

Spermicides can be used with other types of birth control or on their own. To use spermicides:

1. Read and follow the package instructions.
2. Check the expiry date on the package and don't use expired products.
3. Use the right amount of spermicide.
4. Put the spermicide high in the vagina to make sure it covers the cervix.
5. Wait the recommended time between putting in the spermicide and having vaginal sex.
6. Put in more spermicide **each time** you have vaginal sex.

Think about getting **emergency contraception** if you didn't use the spermicide correctly.

What are the benefits of spermicides?

- Spermicides don't contain hormones.
- You don't need a prescription to buy spermicides.
- They can be used by people who are breastfeeding.
- They can be combined with other methods of birth control (e.g., external condoms, diaphragm, birth control pills).

What are the disadvantages of vaginal spermicides?

- Spermicides are one of the least effective types of birth control.
- They can irritate your or your partner(s)' genitals and cause itchiness, redness, or pain.
- They are not recommended for people who are at high risk of getting HIV.
- They may increase the risk of bladder or vaginal infections.
- They need to be used every time you have sex.

Did you know

- You have the right to decide to have sex or not. Talk with your partner(s) about consent.
- There's an 85% chance of becoming pregnant within one year if no birth control is used for vaginal sex.
- Use a condom/barrier every time you have sex (oral, vaginal, anal). Condoms help prevent pregnancy, STIs and HIV.
- You can lower your risk of HIV by taking an HIV prevention pill every day. Many Albertans can get it for free. Visit www.prepalberta.ca to find out more.
- Transgender and gender diverse people who have a uterus can use hormonal birth control. It can help prevent pregnancy and make periods lighter and less painful.

Websites

- ahs.ca/srh
- ReadyorNotAlberta.ca
- TeachingSexualHealth.ca
- myhealth.alberta.ca
- sexandu.ca

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.



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