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Press Briefing: Tuesday, May 25, 1:15 p.m., ET
Use of Lubricants, Unprotected Anal Sex and the Risk of HIV

Use of lubricants with anal sex associated with more rectal STIs

Lubricants are typically used before and during receptive anal intercourse, but their use could increase the risk of rectal sexually transmitted infections (STIs), a study involving nearly 900 men and women in Baltimore and Los Angeles has found. Even after controlling for gender, HIV status, city, condom use, and number of sex partners in the past month, the association between lubricant use before receptive rectal intercourse and rectal STIs remained strong, reported Pamina Gorbach, Dr.PH, from the School of Public Health and the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles, who led the study. According to the study's statistical analysis that considered the HIV status, gender, condom use and study site, participants who used lubricants before receptive anal intercourse were three times more likely to have a rectal STI. Although the analysis didn't consider the specific lubricants being used, it may be that certain types of products are more irritating to the lining of the rectum than others, which could increase men and women's vulnerability to rectal STIs, the researchers suggest.

The study, which was conducted between October 2006 and December 2008, examined the rectal health and behaviors of 879 men and women. Participants in the study were tested for gonorrhea and Chlamydia and asked about their sexual and hygiene practices in private computer-based interviews. Of the 879 participants, 421 reported having receptive anal intercourse in the past month (229 men) or in the past year (192 women) and of these 421, 302 provided the researchers with additional information about their use of lubricants. About half, or 147 (52.7 percent) said they used a lubricant when they last engaged in anal sex.

Of the 302 included in the analysis, 25 (8.3 percent) tested positive for a bacterial rectal STI (5.6 percent of women and 10.2 percent of men). But among those who said they recently used a lubricant, the number of STIs was higher. With STI test results available for 145 of the 147 recent users, the researchers found that 17 (11.7 percent) tested positive for a rectal STI compared to just seven (5.1 percent) of the 156 who said they did not use a lubricant. A higher percentage of African Americans (61 percent) reported using lubricants than did Hispanics (40.4 percent) and whites (23.2 percent). A higher percentage of HIV-positive participants (56 percent) were more likely to report using lubricants than were HIV-negative participants (43.7 percent). Most of the participants who reported using lubricants said they used a water-based lubricant (76 percent); 28 percent used silicon-based products, 17 percent oil-based lubricants and 6 percent said they had used numbing lubricants. More research will be needed to understand exactly how lubricants facilitate transmission of STIs, including HIV, the researchers say.

Presentation: Tuesday, 10:45 a.m., May 25, Ballroom
Session 38 – Oral Abstracts: Rectal Sex: Frequency and Impact (9:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m.)

(Abstract #348)
Rectal Lubricant Use and Risk for Rectal STI

(see following page for full abstract)

Rectal Lubricant Use and Risk for Rectal STI

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Background: Use of sexual lubricant products (lube) before and during receptive anal intercourse (RAI) is common among men and women. Lubes may increase vulnerability to rectal sexually transmitted infections (STIs) possibly via mucosal irritation. This association was examined in a study of rectal health and behaviors of 896 men and women in Los Angeles and Baltimore.

Methods: From October 2006-December 2008, men and women from the UCLA IPCP U19 0606414 in Los Angeles and Baltimore completed computer-administered self interviews about sexual and hygiene behavior, were tested for rectal STIs (Gonorrhea and Chlamydia) and 302 of the 896 reported practice of RAI in the past month (men) or in the past year (women). Frequencies for lube use before last RAI and associations with demographics, HIV status, and other behaviors are presented. Associations of lube use with rectal STI were tested using univariate and multivariate regression.

Results: Overall 76% reported lube use before last RAI and 8.3%% tested positive for a rectal STI (5.6% of women and 10.2% of men). 11.7% of lube users were positive for rectal STI vs 4.5% who did not use lube ($p<.05$). Lube users reported on all types of lubes used, many reported using > 1 type. Most reported water-based lube use (76%) but silicon, oil- based, and numbing lubes were reported by 28%, 17%, and 6% respectively. Fewer African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos than Whites reported lube use (38.5%, 58%, and 72%, respectively $p<.0001$). More HIV positives reported lube use than HIV negatives (57% vs 40%, $p=.006$). There was no difference by age, numbers of sex partners in the past month, and partner type in lube use before RAI. In multivariate logistic regression analysis lube use was associated with rectal STI (AOR 3.15, 95% CI 1.23, 8.04) after controlling for gender, HIV status, city, condom use, and number of sex partners in the past month.

Conclusions: Findings suggest use of some rectal lubricant products may increase vulnerability to rectal STIs, highlighting a need for more research on types of rectal lubricant products, their use during RAI, and potential mechanisms for how rectal lube use may facilitate transmission of rectal STIs and HIV.