Where can you get vaginal spermicides?

Spermicides are available without a prescription at many locations, including drug stores, school health clinics, Planned Parenthood, public health and other community health clinics.

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Spermicides

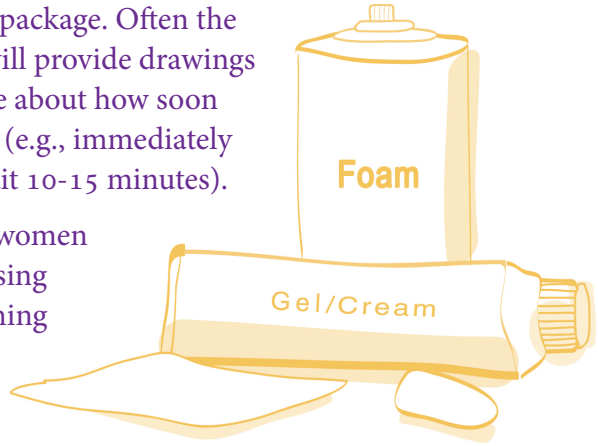
How vaginal spermicides work

Spermicides contain chemicals that kill sperm. Vaginal spermicides come in several forms (gel, foam, cream, film, suppository, or tablet). Some spermicides are used along with a diaphragm or cap (i.e., gels, creams and foam) while others can be used alone.

Nonoxynol-9 (the active chemical used in products available in the United States) destroys the sperm. Other ingredients are used in spermicides made in other countries.

How to use vaginal spermicides

To use vaginal spermicides correctly, follow the instructions in the package. Often the package instructions will provide drawings and give specific advice about how soon the method is effective (e.g., immediately after insertion or to wait 10-15 minutes).



Do not douche. Some women want to douche after using spermicides, but douching not only makes this method less effective, it is associated with an increased risk of vaginal infections, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and ectopic pregnancy.

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For a spermicide to be effective you must follow the package instructions. Most spermicides must be in the vagina for no more than one hour before sex. To increase the effectiveness, use the spermicide along with a condom.

Effectiveness

Research about the effectiveness of vaginal spermicides is not as clear as for other birth control methods. Approximately 18 in 100 women will get pregnant in one year if they use spermicides correctly and every time they have sex (82% perfect use effectiveness). Your chance of getting pregnant goes up if you don't use it every time or don't follow the package instructions. Typical use is 28 women out of 100 may get pregnant in one year (72% effectiveness).

Benefits and advantages of spermicides

Spermicides are an over-the-counter birth control method; they do not need a prescription. Using spermicides does not require the direct involvement of the male partner.

Potential side effects or disadvantages

Some people report allergic reactions to spermicides; trying a different brand may help. Inserting spermicides may be difficult for some people.

Using spermicides will not protect against HIV (AIDS) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, genital warts (HPV), hepatitis B and syphilis.

Potential risks

Frequent use of spermicides (more than 2 times per day) can cause internal vaginal irritation and increase transmission risk of HIV infection. Ask your health provider about your risk level.

There are no other known health risks.

GENERAL REFERENCE: Contraceptive Technology (CT): 20th Rev. Ed., 2011 and CT Update (monthly newsletter).