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Vaginal gel can fight herpes

NEW YORK: A vaginal gel that sharply reduces a woman's risk of infection with the AIDS virus is even more effective against genital herpes, a much more common risk for young American women, a new study has found.

Volunteers in a study on slashing the risk of HIV infection learned of the tests' results last year.

The study, by researchers from the National Institutes of Health, Gilead Sciences Inc and universities in Belgium and Italy, suggests that the microbicide gel, which was originally developed to fight AIDS in Africa,

could lower the incidence of herpes in many women.

"This could be incredibly helpful," said Dr Jeanne Marrazzo, a herpes expert.

"Protection that a woman can control is the holy grail in this field. It's hard for me to believe that something that protects against both HIV and herpes wouldn't be appealing to a lot of young women."

Genital herpes is far more common than AIDS. The World Health Organisation estimates that 20 per cent of all sexually active adults have it. — NYT