

If Vagina Gel to Blunt HIV/AIDS Transmission Confirmed, Rep. Sara Feigenholtz Pledges Legislative Action



State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago)

(Chicago, IL) — July 25, 2010. [The XVIII International AIDS Conference in Vienna this week announced that a new vaginal gel](#) has been shown to significantly reduce a woman's risk of being infected with HIV, which is prompting a pledge of legislative action by State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago).

The microbicide gel contains an antiretroviral drug commonly used to treat people living with HIV, and was found in a clinical trial study to be 39%

effective in reducing a woman's risk of becoming infected with HIV during vaginal intercourse.

For women in Chicago—particularly African-American women—this is potentially good news.

There are 4,866 females living with HIV/AIDS in the City of Chicago. Of these, 3,701 (76%) are Black, 617 (13%) are Hispanic, 439 (9%) are White, and 109 (2%) are of another race, according to the Chicago Department of Public Health.

In 2006, Chicago women accounted for 20% of diagnosed HIV infections, a percentage that has remained unchanged over the last six years. The gender gap, however, varies considerably by race and ethnicity. Women represent 29% of all HIV infections among Blacks, 17% among Hispanics, and 5% among Whites.

The leading mode of transmission for women is heterosexual contact. Among female HIV infections diagnosed in 2006, 79% were transmitted through heterosexual contact, and 20% through injection drug use.

And Feigenholtz is promising legislative action if the gel proves effective.

"The breakthrough on HIV/AIDS prevention for women announced at the Vienna conference is deeply welcome news," said Feigenholtz, Chair of the House Human Services Appropriations Committee, the legislature's leading HIV/AIDS expert.

“If further clinic trials were to confirm that the microbicide gel reduces HIV/AIDS transmission, I would sponsor legislation to ensure low-income Illinois women have access to the gel to save lives and save tax payers expensive HIV/AIDS treatment costs.”

And at the Chicago-based [Children’s Place Association](#), which provides an early-learning program for HIV/AIDS-infected or affected children, the organization’s president, **Cathy Krieger**, is welcoming the news out of Vienna.

“If other studies confirm the vaginal gel outcomes, this could prevent thousands of new HIV infections in Chicago over the next two decades, saving the lives of not only adult women, but also improving the lives of their children.”

Krieger noted, “Approximately 65% of the mothers of the 83 children in our pre-school program have HIV/AIDS. We know that disease endangers not only the fragile health of the moms, but also puts at risk the academic and social development of their children.”