

CANADA: "Grant from Gates Foundation Will Aid Development of Revolutionary New Contraceptive"

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An Ottawa scientist has been awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help develop a vaginal contraceptive that also protects against HIV and other STDs. The recipient is Dr. Nongnuj Tanphaichitr, a senior scientist in reproductive biology at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute and a professor at the University of Ottawa Medical School. Working with her team, Tanphaichitr recently identified a natural antimicrobial peptide that appears to be able to inactivate sperm, viruses, and bacteria. Called LL-37, the peptide is naturally present in human semen, but in an inactive form. In contrast, most existing spermicidal products are chemical detergents that can be toxic and increase the risk of disease transmission. Tanphaichitr proposes delivering the active peptide via a vaginal ring that would release it slowly during an extended period of time. The grant is one of 65 announced in the fifth round of the foundation's Grand Challenges Exploration. Grantees were selected from among 2,400 applicants.