

# THE ART OF RESEARCH



## Foreign vaginal washes only make the cervix abnormal

The use of vaginal products could be the driving factor for a high risk of HIV and STI infections.

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**Further information:**

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1365-3156.2010.02687.x>

**M**ost adolescent females in rural KwaZulu-Natal – an area with a high burden of STIs – currently perform vaginal practices or use vaginal products for a variety of reasons, such as to retain sexual partners through tightening and warming the vagina for sexual pleasure, or for vaginal hygiene.

However, during adolescence, the tissues on the cervix are fragile due to being thin and having a vascularised epithelium. Using sex-enhancing products in the event of sexual intercourse may cause the cervix to be more vulnerable to significant inflammatory responses and epithelial barrier disruption; this can lead to easy access to the blood and lymphatic systems by STIs, including HIV, and a higher possibility of compromised mucosal barriers.

To evaluate the high lifetime risk of adverse events that may result from using these products, researchers at UCT are investigating the prevalence of vaginal products, self-reported side effects by these adolescents, and resulting cervical effects (inflammation, cervical ectopy, trauma, grossly white findings or abnormal discharge) caused by these vaginal products.

“Our research will raise the clinical significance of these products on the naive epithelial lining, and hopefully impart knowledge about the resulting changes felt by these women when they use these products,” says Phumla Radebe.



*The use of vaginal products may increase the risk of HIV and STI infections.*

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