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SCHAKOWSKY, DAVIS, SHAYS, INTRODUCE BILL TO COMBAT HIV INFECTION

TOPICAL MICROBICIDES COULD PREVENT INFECTION OF MILLIONS OF WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), joined by her colleagues Representative Chris Shays (R-CT) and Representative Danny Davis (D-IL), today introduced the Microbicide Development Act to combat HIV infection by investing in this new technology. Microbicides are products that would be applied topically as gels or foams to prevent HIV infection in women, who would no longer have to rely only on their male partners to take precautions to prevent infection.

The face of HIV/AIDS is changing because of the growth of infection rates among women. Over 14,000 people are infected with HIV worldwide each and every day, and about 7,000 of them are women. Many of these women live in monogamous relationships but, because they are unable or too afraid to ask their husbands or partners to use condoms, they have no prevention tools at their disposal. The Microbicide Development Act would help realize the life-saving potential of microbicides by providing these women with a topical, easy to use product that would prevent infection.

Representative Schakowsky remarked: "Microbicides could be the first HIV-drugs that allow women fight to HIV-infection on their own. Even a partially effective microbicide could stop the infections of 2.5 million women over three years. This bi-partisan bill may be able to save a generation of women by developing this promising new preventive option."

Representative Davis added: "Microbicides are potentially an important new addition to the tools we have to prevent the spread of HIV -- both inexpensive and effective - better if used in combination with condoms, but offering women significant protection even if their partner is unwilling to use a condom. It is cheaper and more humane to prevent disease than to cure it, even if we had a cure (which we do not have in the case of HIV), yet our health care system consistently de-emphasizes prevention. The Microbicide Development Act is an important step in the right direction for the public health system."

"We need to dedicate more public health resources to developing microbicides quickly," Representative Shays said. "In many settings, an HIV-infected woman has had only one partner: her husband. Microbicides would allow these women to protect themselves against the

spread of disease and allow them to conceive children. Current prevention options are not enough. If women and girls are to have a genuine opportunity to protect themselves, their best option is the rapid development of new HIV-prevention technologies like Microbicides, which women can control."

The Microbicide Development Act would require development and implementation of a federal strategic plan to coordinate ongoing activities among the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the United States Agency of International Development (USAID). The bill would also establish an R&D Unit within the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and expedite the development and implementation of a federal strategic plan at NIH for microbicide research.

With thousands of new HIV infections around the world each day, scientists are racing not only to produce better treatment options, but to find preventative drugs that are easy to distribute and use. At the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok last year, microbicide development was listed at one of the "10 most promising biotechnologies for improving global health." Scientists are currently testing over 50 different microbicide compounds to determine whether they will be able to help prevent HIV and other STDs. If one of them is successful, a microbicide to prevent HIV could be publicly available in five to seven years.

Despite the promise of microbicides, neither major pharmaceutical nor biotechnology companies have made a substantive investment into their research and development. Because companies have failed to invest in this research, a higher level of public investment and attention is necessary.

Representative Schakowsky emphasized the immediate need for an investment in microbicide research. "The need to reduce HIV infections and AIDS deaths is overwhelming and immediate. In the last 25 years, 40 million people around the world and over 30,000 in Illinois have been infected with the disease. Now the disease is having a disproportionate effect on women. Microbicides may hold the key to HIV-prevention among women, and they deserve our immediate attention and investment."

The Microbicides Development Act has wide support in the Illinois delegation. Representatives Melissa Bean (D-Palatine), Rahm Emanuel (D-Chicago), Lane Evans (D-Moline), Luis Gutierrez (D-Chicago), Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-Chicago), Mark Kirk (R-Deerfield) and Bobby Rush (D-Chicago) have also signed on as original co-sponsors of this bill, and Senator Obama is the

lead sponsor in the Senate.