Compound may block HIV

Researchers have identified a cheap, commonly-used compound that, applied vaginally, can st monkeys being infected with a primate version of HIV.

The discovery, by the University of Minnesota, raises hopes of a similar microbicidal treatment to block HI transmission in humans. Several microbicides have been tested, but results have been disappointing.

The study - focusing on a compound called glycerol monolaurate (GML) - is published online by the journa *Nature*.

GML is a naturally occurring compound widely used as an antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory agent in foo and cosmetics. Crucially, it is also cheap, and is likely to protect against other sexually transmitted infectio too.

Lead researcher Dr Ashley Haase said that if GML proved to be effective in blocking HIV it could potentia help to save millions of lives. A majority of cases of HIV worldwide are now contracted vaginally, and in Su Saharan Africa, where the pandemic is at its most intense, women account for nearly 60% of new infectior

Ten monkeys - five treated with the gel, and five untreated - were injected with doses of SIV large enough infect 50% of cells. Four hours later, the monkeys were again treated with GML and then given a second dose. The researchers monitored the animals for evidence of SIV infection for two weeks.

If there was no evidence of infection, the procedure was repeated for a second time.

Four of the five untreated monkeys contracted SIV, but the infection was not seen in any of the animals wh were treated with the GML gel.

Further research is needed before the results can be extrapolated to humans.