

Government

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Clinical Trials Show Drug 'Truvada' Significantly Prevents Infection, Says FDA

Washington: For the first time, a once-a-day pill which reduces the chance of contracting HIV among high risk groups "significantly" has got green signal in the US, where 1.2 million people are infected by the deadly disease. The drug, 'Truvada' can now be used by those at high risk of the infection and anyone who may engage in sexual activity with HIV-infected partners, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced.

"In two large clinical trials, daily use of the drug was shown to significantly reduce the risk of HIV infection," it said on Monday. However, some health workers and groups active in the HIV community opposed the approval for the once-a-day pill.

There are concerns that circulation of such a drug could engender a false sense of security and mean people will take more risks. There have also been fears that a drug-resistant strain of HIV could develop. People diagnosed with HIV that without treatment develops into AIDS take antiviral medications to control the infection that attacks their immune system.

In a statement, the FDA stressed that the drug should be used as part of a "comprehensive HIV prevention plan", including condom use and regular HIV testing. Studies show that Truvada reduced the risk of HIV in healthy gay men – and among HIV-negative heterosexual partners of HIV-positive people – by between 44% and 73%.

"In the 80s and early 90s, HIV was viewed as a life-threatening disease; in some parts of the world it still is. Medical advances, along with the availability of close to 30 approved individual HIV drugs, have enabled us to treat it as a chronic disease most of the time," Debra Birnkrant, director of the Division of Antiviral Products at FDA, said. PTI

GM bacteria prevents malaria transmission

In a breakthrough, US scientists have genetically modified a bacterium to kill the parasite that causes malaria before it infects humans. Researchers at Johns Hopkins Malaria Research

Institute said their breakthrough could help prevent mosquitoes from transmitting malaria to humans. Malaria kills over 800,000 people worldwide every year, most of them are children. In the new study, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the researchers modified the bacterium, called *Pantoea agglomerans*, to secrete proteins that are toxic to the malaria parasite, but not harmful to the mosquito or humans. The bacterium is commonly found in the mosquito's midgut. It was found that the modified bacteria were 98 per cent effective in reducing the malaria parasite burden in the insects, the researchers said. PTI



NIPPING IT IN THE BUD

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