



Kaiser Daily Global Health Policy Report

News Outlets Examine HIV Vaccine Research, Cervical Cancer Screening Data Presented At Conference

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Several news outlets examine the latest reports out of this week's [Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections](#) (CROI) in San Francisco.

Researchers from the Maryland-based VIRxSYS Corporation on Thursday presented data on the outcomes of the company's HIV vaccine, VRX1023, from a recent trial carried out in monkeys, [Reuters](#) reports. The scientists genetically engineered a version of HIV for use in the vaccine, "an approach that has been rejected as unworkable in the past," according to Reuters. The news service reports that while the therapeutic vaccine "did not protect the monkeys from infection, it did reduce how much virus circulated in the blood after they were infected, a measure called viral load. In humans, the lower the viral load, usually the healthier the patient is" (Fox, 2/18).

Based on its trial with 15 monkeys, the researchers concluded "VRX1023, is capable of achieving significant control of viral load over the course of four months following a challenge with a highly pathogenic simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), a virus found in non-human primates and similar to HIV. In addition, monkeys vaccinated with VRX1023 demonstrated an improved immune response," according to a [company press release](#) (2/18).

Gary McGarrity, of VIRxSYS, "believes [VRX1023] may work as a so-called therapeutic vaccine – one used to treat people who are already infected, as opposed to one that can prevent infection," Reuters writes. The researchers hope to soon move their vaccine trials into humans. The article also examines the preliminary data from VIRxSYS's Phase I/II trial of VRX496, an investigational RNA therapy for treatment of HIV/AIDS (2/18).

A second [Reuters](#) story examines how scientists continue to analyze and learn from the results of [the experimental HIV vaccine](#) tested in patients in Thailand. Nelson Michael, of the Walter Reed Army Research Institute, one of the leaders of the Thailand study, provided an update on the analysis of the study during the CROI conference on Thursday (Fox, 2/18).

Also at the conference, researchers described how a low-cost cervical screening program in Zambia has successfully reached out to women living with HIV, [IRIN/PlusNews](#) reports. "It is thought that women living with HIV are at a higher risk of cervical cancer, but the number of women being screened for the cancer remains low, especially in developing countries," the news service writes.

Groesbeck Parham, of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, presented data from a pilot study of about 6,600 HIV-positive women who were screened for cervical cancer, according to the news service. "More than half the women had abnormal results, and about 20 percent were diagnosed as having lesions at varying stages from pre-cancerous to advanced cancer," IRIN/PlusNews writes. According to the study results, "cervical cancer screening among HIV-positive women [in Zambia] prevented one death for every 32 women screened" (2/18).

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