

## Male contraceptive being trialled in Melbourne dubbed a game changer by researchers

By [Melissa Brown](#)

Posted Fri 11 Nov 2022 at 1:41pm, updated Fri 11 Nov 2022 at 2:43pm



The trial involves injecting men with a hydrogel that blocks sperm from traveling to the testes. (Supplied: Epworth HealthCare)

A Melbourne hospital is trialling what it says is the world's first injectable male contraceptive.

Twenty-five men will be administered a hydrogel that blocks the sperm from travelling from the testes, then dissolves.

Researchers at the Epworth Freemasons Hospital in East Melbourne believe the 10-minute procedure will be effective for up to two years, and have dubbed it a "temporary vasectomy".

Urologist Nathan Lawrentschuk, the principal investigator, said the three-year study was investigating whether the gel was effective as a non-permanent, long-lasting male contraceptive.

"You come into a medical centre or hospital and have some local aesthetic injected, we then find the vas deferens tube [sperm duct] in much the same way that you would for a vasectomy," Professor Lawrentschuk said.

"However, instead of removing part of that tube, all we do is place some gel inside that tube, and therefore that will block the flow."

### Key points:

- A gel is injected into the tube that carries sperm to block passage to the testes
- The procedure takes 10 minutes but could last for up to two years
- Researchers say it could see men share the burden of responsibility for contraception



Researchers say the procedure is like a temporary vasectomy. (Supplied: Epworth HealthCare)

Professor Lawrentschuk said it could be a game changer, helping men in heterosexual relationships share the responsibility of contraception.

"In this instance, men would be in control of their own contraception and can enter into the fray which is often placed on their partner," he said.

He said there was nothing similar to this anywhere in the world.

"Years ago, they talked about the male contraceptive pill that sort of didn't really develop or take off," Professor Lawrentschuk said.

"There might be many circumstances where it could be extremely useful — their partner can't take contraception, they may have come out of a long relationship where they want a period of known inability to have a child."

Professor Lawrentschuk said the team was so "overwhelmed" with men wanting to be involved in the trial, they had to shut down the expressions of interest.

## 'Striking inequality' in male pill investment

Liza O'Donnell, reproductive health scientist at the Hudson Institute of Medical Research, said the Epworth Freemasons trial appeared promising as long as its effects proved to be truly reversible.

"The longer a man has had a vasectomy, the less likely it will be fully reversible and the more likely that he might have to go through IVF to impregnate his partner," she said.

"Given this is only a two-year vasectomy, if you like, it's much better and more likely to be reversible."

Dr O'Donnell, who is not involved in the Epworth Freemasons research, has studied the development of hormone-based male contraceptive.

She said effective male oral contraceptives similar to 'the pill' had already been successfully trialled but were not on the market, purely due to a lack of support from the pharmaceutical industry.

"And that's because they are wary about giving hormones to healthy men," she said.

Dr O'Donnell said it was "a point of frustration for all of us working in the field".

"If the male hormonal contraceptives have been discovered before the female pill, it would have been absolutely supported.

"I just find the inequality striking."

Dr O'Donnell believed the hydrogel injection would be more successful in gaining investment, if the trial was successful, because it would not affect male hormones.

## Male contraception eagerly awaited

Carolyn Mogharbel is the Acting Chief Executive Officer of health advocacy group Women's Health Victoria, as well as the manager of the contraception, pregnancy and sexual health phone line 1800 My Options.

"We've been waiting a long time for something that works well and for men to be able to take some of that responsibility [for contraception]," Ms Magharbel said

She said the only way men had been able to take on that responsibility was with condoms or vasectomies.

"Which is great but not 100 per cent effective and also reliant on someone using it perfectly and having them on hand when needed," she said.

She said vasectomies could be permanent, and were not always suitable for someone who might want to be a parent later on.

Ms Mogharbel said the hydrogel contraceptive was particularly appealing because of the promise that it would to be long lasting, but reversible.

But she said health professionals must stress to men that condoms were still crucial to protect health.

"They're the only STI prevention."

"I would see this as being a little bit more directed towards men who are wanting to delay children rather than men who are wanting to prevent STIs."



Dr Liza O'Donnell says she's frustrated a male oral contraception wasn't already on the market. (Supplied: Dr Liza O'Donnell)

Ms Magharbel said it would be important for the device to be affordable and available locally, such as at GP clinics.

The men involved in the study will undergo regular health checks and provide semen samples for three years.

Epworth is running the trial in partnership with a company from United States but, if successful, it will still be some years before the product is on the market.



Carolyn Mogharbel says it's important male contraceptives are affordable and available locally. *(Supplied: Carolyn Mogharbel)*