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If it's not on, it's not on... unless it's a gel based condom

ACES researchers have received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop a smart condom.

Designed to assist countries where significant social, economic and environmental problems stem from a lack of birth control and the spread of STDs, the condom will be developed from an advanced material called Hydrogel.

Hydrogels can feel, look and act like natural flesh and can be made to self-lubricate, release topical drugs and biodegrade. They are also very safe materials, currently used in many food products.

Project leader, ACES Strategic Development Officer Dr Robert Gorkin said he hopes the development could lead to more widespread condom use.

"Making condoms out of materials that provide a more skin-like feeling could help overcome the perceived lack of sensation with latex," he said.

ACES has pushed the boundaries of hydrogel development for artificial muscles and implantable bionic devices for many years.

ACES Director Professor Gordon Wallace said the project demonstrates how the ACES environment encourages researchers to build on core fundamental materials research to solve significant challenges.

"We have in place training programs to equip emerging research leaders with all of the skills necessary to achieve this," he said.

Combining researchers from the University of Wollongong's Global Challenges program and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute, in addition to ACES, the collaborative team was one of only 52 grants funded worldwide, out of more than 1,700 applications.

"We are extremely excited about this incredible opportunity," said Dr Gorkin.

"This could make a genuine impact on the health and wellbeing of people worldwide."

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Dr Robert Gorkin is available for interview. High res photos and video available.

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