

Title/Issue:

Are tiny amounts of ethanol (alcohol) in the ProTECT study drug haram?

Explanation:

The study drug in this clinical trial is progesterone. The progesterone solution used in this study, like many medicines, contains a very small amount of ethyl alcohol. The amount of alcohol being given is not enough to cause any intoxication. This alcohol is needed to make the progesterone solution, but raises the question of whether it makes the study medicine haram.

Is it haram? There is no definitive answer to this question, but many Muslims will defer to prior determinations of Islamic law. Most Islamic scholarly work suggests it is permissible to take medicines with the intent of alleviating illness even if they contain unavoidable small amounts of alcohol as a solvent. For some Muslims, however, this will be an individual decision, and the following discussion is meant to help explain this question of law.

Alcohol ingestion is clearly designated as *haram* because it is a substance leading to *Sukr* (intoxication). For many Muslims, any agent or process leading to a disconnection from a state of awareness or consciousness (a state in which he or she may forget the creator) is called *Sukr*, which is *haram*.

However, any substance that man can manufacture or develop in order to alleviate illness or aid health is permitted. In this capacity, the substance is not used as an agent of *Sukr*. For example, cocaine is permitted as a local anaesthetic (*halal*, allowed), but inadmissible as a recreational drug (*haram*).

This problem has been discussed in many venues including the 16th meeting of the Muslim Scholars' Board of the World Muslim League in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in January, 2002. The Muslim Scholars' Board reaffirmed that medicines that contain alcohol are permissible if no substitute exists. Other scholarly opinions also support this view.

It is not clear if this ruling specifically applies to medicines being used in clinical trials like ProTECT. We could not, however, find any published scholarly opinions that exclude any medicines because they are being studied.

Muslims with lingering concerns may wish to consult with their religious leaders, or may want to enter themselves in the national "opt out" registry to avoid being enrolled in the study.

For study sites: This question and answer may be relevant in other religious communities as well where alcohol is also forbidden (such as in Seventh Day Adventists. As with all EFIC trials, this issue is best addressed with due diligence during community consultation and public disclosure activities.

Reference: *Qanta A Ahmed, Ziad A Memish, Benedetta Allegranzi, Didier Pittet, on behalf of the WHO Global Patient Safety Challenge, [Muslim health-care workers and alcohol-based handrubs](#) Lancet 2006; 367: 1025–27*