



Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

What is Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)?

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a type of vaginal infection that results from the overgrowth of bacteria normally present in the vagina. Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is the most common vaginal infection in women of reproductive age. The normal vagina contains many types of bacteria. One type of bacteria, Lactobacillus, is present in higher levels and is considered helpful as it keeps the vaginal bacteria in balance. Bacterial Vaginosis results when there is an overgrowth of some of the other bacteria.

How is Bacterial Vaginosis spread?

Bacterial Vaginosis is not considered to be a sexually transmitted infection (STI). However, it is more common in women who have been sexually active. Risk factors include:

- Multiple sex partners or a new sex partner
- Women who have sex with women
- Douching as this can lead to an overgrowth of “bad” bacteria
- IUD use
- A natural lack of “good” lactobacilli bacteria

What are the signs and symptoms?

Bacterial Vaginosis only occurs in women and signs and symptoms may include:

- Thin, grayish white vaginal discharge
- Foul-smelling “fishy” vaginal odor, especially after sexual intercourse
- Vaginal itching or irritation
- Pain during intercourse
- Burning during urination
- Light vaginal bleeding

Often, you may have Bacterial Vaginosis and have no signs or symptoms.



How is it Bacterial Vaginosis diagnosed?

To diagnose Bacterial Vaginosis, your health care provider may:

- Ask questions about your medical history
- Perform a pelvic exam
- Examine a sample of vaginal discharge under a microscope

How is Bacterial Vaginosis treated?

It's not a good idea to use medication for a vaginal infection unless you know what is causing it. See your healthcare provider or go to a Sexual Health Clinic. If you have symptoms, it is likely that you will be treated with medication. The most common medication used is called Flagyl. You should not drink any alcohol while you are taking this medication and for 48 hours after you have finished all the pills. Alcohol can react with Flagyl and cause nausea and vomiting. It is important to tell your healthcare provider if you are pregnant since a different medication may be used. Birth control pills may not work very well when you are taking some antibiotics. Keep taking your birth control pills while taking any medication. Also use a second form of birth control, such as a condom, until your next period after completing the antibiotics.

What are the health risks of Bacterial Vaginosis?

Usually, there are no long-term complications. Health risks that may occur include:

- Increased risk of pre-term labor and birth if BV is present during pregnancy
- Increased risk of developing Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) if BV is present at the time of an abortion, gynecological surgery, or IUD insertion
- Increased risk of getting other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

What can I do to prevent Bacterial Vaginosis?

- Don't douche unless your doctor recommends it
- Wear cotton underwear
- Avoid tight pants, especially those with spandex and synthetic underwear
- Use condoms and lubricant for sexual intercourse
- Limit sex partners
- Stay out of hot tubs and whirlpool spas
- Rinse soap from your outer genital area and dry the area well to prevent irritation
- Use mild soaps and unscented tampons or pads
- Wipe from front to back so you don't bring rectal bacteria into the vagina

Is follow up important?

Follow-up is not necessary unless you are pregnant or symptoms reoccur. For some women, recurrent BV is common. If you have different sexual partners, or if your partner has different partners, you should also be tested for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, and HIV. Your risk of getting an STI increases with the number of sexual partners you have. Also consider getting vaccinations to prevent Hepatitis B infection.

For more information on Bacterial Vaginosis, please contact a member of the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit's Sexual Health Program or the Infectious Disease Team.



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