



August 2011

Community and Health Services Department

# Bacterial Vaginosis

## What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a common vaginal infection. Normally, many types of healthy bacteria live inside the vagina in small amounts. These bacteria keep each other in balance. BV occurs when bacteria such as *Gardnerella* overgrow in the vagina.

## Symptoms of Bacterial Vaginoasis

Some women may or may not have symptoms. Symptoms can include one or more of the following:

- vaginal “fish like” odour which is more noticeable after intercourse
- vaginal discharge that is thin, grey and milky
- itching and/or burning near the vagina

## How Bacterial Vaginosis spreads

The cause of bacterial vaginosis is not fully understood. While BV is more common in women who are sexually active, it is also found in up to 15 percent of women who have never had sex. The likelihood of developing this infection is not affected by whether a female has sex with males or females. BV is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Some activities that can upset the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina include:

- having a new or multiple sexual partners
- douching or using feminine hygiene products
- using an Intrauterine Device (IUD) for contraception

## Complications of Bacterial Vaginosis

There are usually no complications. Bacterial vaginosis is occasionally linked to a condition called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID is a serious infection of the lining of the uterus, fallopian tubes and/or ovaries.

## Having BV can increase:

- the chance of developing PID after procedures such as an abortion
- a woman’s susceptibility to STIs, including HIV
- the likelihood that an HIV infected woman can pass HIV to her sex partner
- the risk of complications during pregnancy

For further information, please call:  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

## Diagnosing Bacterial Vaginosis

A health care provider can often tell if a woman has bacterial vaginosis by a physical examination and looking at the discharge from her vagina. A sample of the discharge may be sent to a laboratory for testing.

## Treating Bacterial Vaginosis

It is up to your health care provider whether or not to treat BV if it is not causing you any symptoms.

**However, you must be treated if you are pregnant, having gynecologic surgery or IUD insertion, even if you have no symptoms.**

Bacterial vaginosis is usually treated with medication called Metronidazole (Flagyl). Flagyl has been deemed safe to take while breastfeeding and in all stages of pregnancy. Alcohol can react with Flagyl to cause severe nausea and vomiting. **Do not** drink alcohol or use medications containing alcohol (e.g., some cough remedies) during treatment and for at least one day after treatment is completed.

Bacterial vaginosis is sometimes treated with Clindamycin pills or vaginal cream.

## What about Sexual Partners?

Partners are usually not treated.

## Importance of a Follow-Up

Follow-up is not needed if the symptoms have disappeared.

Remember:

- ✓ take all the medication as prescribed by your doctor or clinic (Note: Medication is provided free of charge at York Region sexual health clinics.)
- ✓ do not drink alcohol during treatment and for one day after treatment is completed
- ✓ do not have sex while you are being treated
- ✓ do not use douches and feminine hygiene products as they disturb the natural balance of bacteria in the vagina
- ✓ use condoms to lower the chance of getting STIs and to prevent pregnancy
- ✓ it is possible to have more than one infection at a time, so it is important to be tested for STIs

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