

Bacterial Vaginosis

What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a common vaginal infection. Many types of healthy bacteria normally live inside the vagina in small amounts and keep each other in balance. BV occurs when bacteria such as Gardnerella overgrow in the vagina.

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 it spreads

The cause of BV is not fully understood. While it is more common in women who are sexually active, it is also found in up to 15 per cent 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).

Activities that can upset the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina include:

- Having new or multiple sexual partners
- Douching or using feminine hygiene products
- Using an Intrauterine Device (IUD) for contraception

Complications

There are usually no complications. BV 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

Diagnosis

A health care provider can often tell if a woman has BV 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.

Treatment

You must be treated if you are pregnant, having



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gynecologic surgery or IUD insertion, even if you have no symptoms.

BV is usually treated with medication called Metronidazole. Metronidazole has been deemed safe to take while breastfeeding and in all stages of pregnancy. Alcohol can react with Metronidazole 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.

Sexual partners are usually not treated.

Protection

The following actions may help reduce your risk for developing BV.

- Limit your number of sexual partners
- Do not douche
- Do not smoke
- Complete all medications prescribed for BV even if your symptoms go away before you have finished your treatment

Followup

Followup 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 from beginning to end of any sexual contact 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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