



# Bacterial Vaginosis

## **What is bacterial vaginosis (BV)?**

BV is an overgrowth of bacteria normally found in the vagina. It is most common cause of vaginal discharge. It is not clear what role sexual activity plays in the development of BV.

## **How do you get BV?**

The cause of BV is often not known.

- It is more common in women who are sexually active, especially when there is a new sex partner.
- Anything that may upset the normal balance of flora in the vagina including douches and scented feminine hygiene products may trigger BV
- It is more common in women who have an intrauterine device/system (IUD/IUS).
- Women who have never had sexual intercourse may also be affected
- BV may spread between female sex partners

## **How can you tell if you have BV?**

**Many people who have BV do not have any signs to let them know they have the overgrowth.**

You might notice:

- An increased amount of thin white, or greyish discharge from your vagina
- a fishy odour coming from your vagina
- pain, itching or burning

## **How do you get tested for BV?**

The test for BV is not routine but may be done if you have symptoms or are going for certain procedures (e.g. abortion, IUD/IUS insertion). A healthcare provider must examine the vagina and take a sample of the vaginal fluid to look for bacteria associated with BV.

## **How is BV treated?**

Although BV may clear up without treatment, all women with symptoms should be treated to avoid complications. Medication will easily treat and cure BV but is only needed if:

- you have symptoms
- you are pregnant and are either going for an abortion, or have a history of preterm delivery
- you are planning to have an IUD/IUS inserted or you are going to have gynecological surgery.

BV is usually cured with one treatment, but sometimes the medication may need to be repeated.

## **Do you need follow-up?**

Some women may have a return of symptoms. If this happens to you, see your health care provider for reassessment.

- If you think you might be at risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), consider testing.

## **How can BV be prevented?**

- To prevent bacterial overgrowth avoid activities that upset the balance of normal flora such as: use of feminine sprays, douches, bubble bath, bath oil and deodorant tampons
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothing (wearing cotton underwear may help)
- Be abstinent
- Limit the number of sexual partners
- Always wipe from front to back after using the toilet
- Lactobacilli preparations (found in health food stores and some brands of yogurt) may help restore normal vaginal balance.

Over

## **Who can you talk to if you have more questions?**

If you have concerns or questions call and ask for Sexual Health, or visit our youth website at [www.thephakz.ca](http://www.thephakz.ca), or the health unit website below.



Tel: 721-7520  
Toll free: 1-877-721-7520  
[www.simcoemuskokahealth.org](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org)

*Your Health Connection*

## What are the complications of BV?

Most of the time BV causes no complications. But some serious risks from BV include:

- an increased chance of getting HIV if a woman is exposed to the HIV virus while she has BV
- An increased chance that an HIV-infected female can pass HIV to her sex partner
- An increased chance of developing an infection following surgery like a hysterectomy or abortion
- A chance of pre-term delivery if a woman has BV while pregnant
- An increased chance of getting other STIs, such as herpes simplex (HSV), chlamydia and gonorrhea

Reference:

Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections (2008)

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