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

BV is an overgrowth of bacteria normally found in the vagina.

It is the most common cause of vaginal discharge.

It is not clear what role sexual activity plays in the development of BV.

▶ **How do I get BV?**

The cause of BV is often not known.

- It is more common in sexually active women, especially when there is a new sex partner.
- Anything that upsets the normal balance in the vagina (like douches and scented feminine hygiene products)
- 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 I tell if I have BV?**

About 50 per cent of women who have BV do not have any signs that they have an 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 I get tested for BV?**

A test may be done if you have symptoms or are going for certain procedures (e.g. abortion, IUD/IUS insertion).

A health care provider must examine the vagina and take a sample of the discharge and send it to the lab for testing.

▶ **How is BV treated?**

Medication will easily treat and cure BV but is only needed if you:

- have symptoms that do not clear on their own
- are pregnant and are either going for an abortion, or have a history of preterm delivery
- are for IUD/IUS insertion or have one in place
- are going to have gynecological surgery

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

▶ **Is follow-up necessary?**

No follow-up is required unless you are pregnant or symptoms come back.

If you think you might be at risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), consider getting tested

▶ **How can BV be prevented?**

- 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.

▶ **What are the complications of BV?**

Most of the time BV causes no complications, but some serious risks include a greater chance of:

- getting HIV if you are exposed to the virus while you have BV
- an HIV-infected female passing HIV to her sex partner
- developing an infection following surgery like a hysterectomy or abortion
- pre-term delivery if a woman has BV while pregnant
- getting other STIs, such as herpes simplex (HSV), chlamydia and gonorrhea

▶ **What else do I need to know?**

Partner Implications:

- If a woman has a female partner, both should be treated at the same time
- Male partners do not require treatment

▶ **Who can I talk to if I have more questions?**

If you have concerns or questions, call and ask for Sexual Health, or visit the health unit website below.



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Tel: 705-721-7520
Toll free: 1-877-721-7520
www.simcoemuskokahealth.org

▶ **Resources**

[Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections \(2008\)](#)

[Public Health Agency Canada](#)

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