

Bacterial vaginosis (BV)

What is bacterial vaginosis (BV)?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a common mild imbalance of bacteria in the vagina. The vagina normally contains harmless bacteria. BV occurs when that bacteria over-grows.

What are the symptoms?

If you have bacterial vaginosis, you may not have any symptoms or you may notice a change in the fluid from your vagina, such as some watery discharge. The fluid may also change to a grey colour or have a fish-like odour.

While BV is more common in women who are sexually active, it can occur in women who are not sexually active. It is usually not considered a sexually transmitted infection (STI). However, if you are exposed to an STI while you have BV, you are more likely to be infected by that STI.

How do I know if I have BV?

To find out if you have BV, you must be examined by a health care provider. Lab tests of your vaginal fluid may be done.

Your health care provider may screen you for BV if you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, and have a history of certain risk factors such as:

- Early delivery or pregnancy complications linked to infection, such as premature rupture of membranes
- Amniotic fluid infection
- Late miscarriage
- Low-birth-weight infant or
- Inflammation of the inside of the uterus after vaginal delivery or caesarean section

What is the treatment?

If you have BV, but no symptoms, treatment is not usually necessary. The condition usually goes away without medication.

When you have symptoms, your health care provider may prescribe treatment, so the infection does not spread into the fallopian tubes and cause Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a more serious illness. For more information on PID, see [HealthLinkBC File #08c Pelvic inflammatory disease](#).

BV is treated with antibiotics. Your health care provider may prescribe these as a cream inserted into the vagina or as pills taken by mouth. Only medications taken by mouth are used to treat pregnant women.

It is not necessary for male sexual partner(s) to be tested or treated. It is recommended that female sexual partner(s) of women with BV have an assessment and testing for BV, as it is more common for female sexual partners to acquire BV.

Will my birth control pills work if I am taking antibiotics?

Birth control pills may not work as well when you are taking certain antibiotics. If you are being treated with antibiotics, keep taking your birth control pills and use a second form of birth control, such as a condom, until your next period after completing the antibiotics.

How can I reduce my chance of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Practice safe sex by using a condom

When used as directed, male and female condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs, including HIV, during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms are less effective at protecting against STIs transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, such as

herpes simplex, genital warts (human papillomavirus or HPV), and syphilis.

Important things to remember when using condoms:

- Check the condom package for damage and to ensure the expiry date has not passed
- Carefully open the package so that the condom does not tear
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects such as rings, studs, or piercings
- Store condoms at room temperature
- A new condom should be used every time you have sex
- Use only water-based lubricants with male latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion, or baby oil can weaken and destroy latex
- Avoid using spermicides containing nonoxynol-9 (N-9). It irritates sexual tissue and may increase the chance of getting an STI

Get vaccinated

Some STIs, such as hepatitis A, B and human papillomavirus (HPV) can be prevented with vaccines. Talk to your health care provider about how to get these vaccinations.

Know your sexual health status

If you have recently changed sexual partners, or have multiple sex partners, getting regularly tested for STIs will tell you if you have an infection.

Finding and treating an STI, (including HIV) reduces the chances of passing the infection on to your partner.

The more partners you have, the more likely you are to be exposed to a sexually transmitted infection.

Talk about prevention

Talk to your partner about STIs and how you would like to prevent them before having sex. If you are having trouble discussing safer sex with your partner, talk about it with your health care provider or a counselor.

For tips on how to talk to your partner, visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource at <https://smartsexresource.com/sexual-health/partners-communication/talking-to-your-partners>.

Informing partners

If you have a sexually transmitted infection and are sexually active, it is important to tell your sexual partners. This will enable them to make decisions about their health and getting tested.

For more information

For more information on how you can reduce your chance of getting an STI, see [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority