

## Bacterial vaginosis (BV)

### What is bacterial vaginosis (BV)?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is an imbalance of bacteria normally found in the vagina. The vagina normally contains harmless bacteria. BV occurs when some bacteria overgrow and other bacteria decrease in number.

### What are the symptoms?

If you have BV, 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, particularly after intercourse. It can also cause itching and irritation in the vaginal area.

BV is not classified as a sexually transmitted infection (STI), but it is more common in individuals who are sexually active. If you are exposed to an STI while you have BV, you are more likely to get that STI. Having an IUD, smoking or douching can also increase the chances of having BV.

### How do I know if I have BV?

To find out if you have BV, you must be examined by a health care provider. A lab test 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, like premature rupture of membranes
- Amniotic fluid infection
- Late miscarriage
- Low-birth-weight infant
- 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 often 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, visit [HealthLinkBC File #08c Pelvic inflammatory disease \(PID\)](#).

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 oral medications are used to treat people who are pregnant.

It is recommended that any sexual partners with a vagina get tested for BV.

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

There is very little evidence to show that antibiotics reduce the effectiveness of hormonal birth control. Examples of hormonal birth control include the pill, the patch, the ring or the shot. If you are being treated with antibiotics, it is important to keep using your birth control as you normally would. If you have concerns, use condoms until your next period after finishing the antibiotics or speak to your health care provider for more information.

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

#### Practice safer sex by using a condom

When used correctly, external (“male”) and internal (“female”) condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms are less effective at protecting against STIs transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, such as herpes simplex virus, genital warts (human papillomavirus (HPV)), and syphilis (when sores are present).

#### Important things to remember when using condoms:

- Check the condom package for damage. Do not use a condom that has been damaged
- Check the expiry date. Do not use a condom that has passed its expiry date
- Carefully open the package so that the condom does not tear. Do not use a condom that has been torn
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects such as rings, studs or piercings

- Store condoms at room temperature
- Use a new condom every time you have sex. Do not reuse condoms
- Do not use 2 condoms at once. Using 2 condoms together may result in a condom breaking
- Use only water-based lubricants with external (“male”) latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil, can weaken and destroy latex
- Water or oil-based lubricant may be used with polyurethane/nitrile condoms
- Use only condoms made of latex or polyurethane/nitrile/polyisoprene rubbers. Latex and polyurethane condoms are the best types of condoms to use to help prevent pregnancy and STIs. Lambskin and sheepskin condoms can help prevent pregnancy but don’t work as well as latex or polyurethane condoms to prevent STIs
- Avoid using condoms with spermicides containing nonoxynol-9 (N-9) as it can irritate tissue and may increase the chance of getting an STI

**Practice safer sex by using dental dams or other barriers:**

A dental dam is a piece of thin latex that is placed over the vagina/internal genitals or anus during oral sex. It can also be called a latex barrier/sheet, latex dam, oral dam or sheet. Dental dams are a good way to lower the chance of getting or passing sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

**Important things to remember when using dental dams:**

- Before you use the dam, hold it up to light and check for holes
- Rinse it gently with warm water to remove powder
- Hold the dam over the vagina/internal genitals or anus
- Be sure that only one side of the dam touches the vagina/internal genitals or anus
- Use a new dam each time you have oral sex
- Use a different dam for the anal area and the vagina/internal genital area
- Use lubricant on the vagina/internal genitals or anus to improve sensation

- Dispose of the dam in the garbage

**Medications**

There are medications that can lower your chances of getting or passing on certain STIs. For more information, visit [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).

**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. Some people can have an STI and not have any symptoms. Finding and treating an STI reduces the chances of passing infections on to your partner(s).

The more partners you have, the higher your chance of getting exposed to STIs is.

**Talk about prevention**

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

For tips on how to talk to your partner(s), visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource <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 partner(s). This will enable them to make decisions about their health and testing.

**For more information**

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