



Bacterial vaginosis (BV)

FACT SHEET

BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS IS NOT A REPORTABLE DISEASE/CONDITION. ANY UNUSUAL CASE OR CLUSTER OF CASES THAT MAY INDICATE A PUBLIC HEALTH HAZARD IS REPORTABLE IMMEDIATELY TO THE COOK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH. TO REPORT ANY UNUSUAL CASE OR CLUSTER OF CASES, CALL 708-492-2150.

What is bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is the name of a condition in women where the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina is disrupted and replaced by an overgrowth of certain bacteria. It is the most common vaginal infection in women of childbearing age.

How do you get bacterial vaginosis?

The cause of BV is not fully understood. BV is associated with an imbalance in the bacteria that are normally found in a woman's vagina. Any woman can get BV. It is not clear what role sexual activity plays in the development of BV, and women who have never had sexual intercourse may also be affected. Women do not get BV from toilet seats, bedding, swimming pools, or from touching objects around them.

Some activities or behaviors can upset the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina and put women at increased risk including:

- Having a new sex partner or multiple sex partners,
- Douching

What are the symptoms of bacterial vaginosis?

BV is sometimes accompanied by discharge, odor, pain, itching, or burning. Some women report a strong fish-like odor, especially after intercourse. Discharge, if present, is usually white or gray; it can be thin. Women with BV may also have burning during urination or itching around the outside of the vagina, or both. However, most women with BV report no signs or symptoms at all.

What is the treatment for bacterial vaginosis?

BV is treatable with antimicrobial medicines prescribed by a health care provider: metronidazole or clindamycin. Treatment is especially important for pregnant women. All pregnant women who have ever had a premature delivery or low birth weight baby should be considered for a BV examination, regardless of symptoms, and should be treated if they have BV.

BV can recur after treatment.

Can bacterial vaginosis be prevented?

BV is associated with having a new sex partner or having multiple sex partners. It is seldom found in women who have never had intercourse.

Some basic prevention steps can help reduce the risk of upsetting the natural balance in the vagina and developing BV:

- Not having sex is the best protection against acquiring BV and other STDs.
- Mutual monogamy (having sex with only one uninfected partner)
- Using latex condoms, consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of BV and other STDs.
- Limit the number of sex partners.
- Do not douche.
- Use all of the medicine prescribed for treatment of BV, even if the signs and symptoms go away.