

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)



Burlington County Health Department

Raphael Meadow Health Center
15 Pioneer Boulevard
P.O. Box 6000
Westampton, N.J. 08060
Phone: 609-265-5548 Fax: 609-265-3152



Public Health
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Burlington County Health Department
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What is bacterial vaginosis (BV)?

Bacterial vaginosis is an infection that happens when too much of certain bacteria changes the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina. Any woman can get BV. Bacterial vaginosis is not considered a sexually transmitted disease (STD), but it can increase a woman's chance of getting an STD.

How common is bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis is the most common vaginal infection in women ages 15-44. About 30% of women between those ages get BV in their lifetime.

What causes bacterial vaginosis?

The cause of BV or how some women get it is unknown. We do know that the infection usually occurs in sexually active women. BV is linked to an imbalance of "good" and "bad" bacteria that are normally found in a woman's vagina. Having a new sex partner or multiple sex partners, as well as douching, can upset the balance of bacteria in the vagina. This places women at an increased risk of getting BV. It is not clear what role sexual activity plays in the development of BV. Women who have not had vaginal, oral, or anal sex can still be affected by BV, as can pregnant women. Having BV can increase your chances of getting other STDs.

How can I avoid getting bacterial vaginosis?

Doctors and scientists do not completely understand how BV is spread; and there are no known ways to definitely prevent getting BV. However, the following steps may help you lower your risk of developing BV:

- Not having sex
- Limiting your number of sex partners
- Not douching (cleaning the vagina with water mixed with a cleaning solution).

How do I know if I have bacterial vaginosis?

Most women with BV do not have symptoms. If you do have symptoms, you may notice a thin white or gray vaginal discharge, odor, pain, itching, or burning in the vagina. A strong fish-like odor, especially after sex, may be

present in your vagina. Burning while urinating can occur. If you are experiencing these symptoms, talk to a doctor or health care professional. Your doctor will perform laboratory tests on a sample of vaginal fluid to determine if BV is present.

Can bacterial vaginosis be cured?

Yes, BV can be treated with antibiotics. However, sometimes it will go away on its own. Male sex partners of women diagnosed with bacterial vaginosis generally do not need to be treated. However, BV may be transferred between female sex partners.

What happens if I don't get treated?

Bacterial vaginosis can cause serious health risks, including:

- Increasing your chance of getting HIV if you have sex with someone who is infected with HIV
- If you have HIV, increasing your chance of passing HIV to your sex partner
- Increasing your chance of getting other STDs, such as chlamydia and gonorrhea
- Making it more likely that you will deliver your baby too early if you have BV while pregnant

Where can you get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Burlington County Department of Health at (609)-265-5533.
- The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) at 1-800-624-2377 or on the NJDOH Website at <http://www.nj.gov/health/>