

What is bacterial vaginosis?

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Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a genital infection that can cause an abnormal vaginal discharge or odour, but in up to 50% of women does not cause symptoms. Although the cause of this infection is still unknown, it is one of the commonest bacterial genital conditions in women of reproductive age worldwide. However we do not know how common this condition is in young women who do not have symptoms. BV is not thought to be sexually transmitted.

Are there any symptoms of infection?

Women: About 50% of women with BV will not have any symptoms at all. But, when they do they may notice an abnormal vaginal discharge, or an unpleasant odour. If you have these symptoms, tell your doctor who will arrange for testing and treatment.

Men: This condition does not occur in men.

Why are we worried about BV?

Treatment is only currently recommended for BV if a woman has symptoms. BV may cause complications in some women, particularly if a woman is pregnant or having a gynecological procedure. Following giving birth or an abortion, some women can develop an infection of the womb (uterus) and fallopian tubes (that connect the ovaries to the womb), a condition called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). If a woman is pregnant, BV may increase her risk of having a miscarriage or delivering a baby prematurely. BV may also increase a woman's risk of acquiring HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

How do you catch BV?

We do not know why BV occurs. Currently, it is not thought to be sexually transmitted. Treatment of male partners is not needed.

How do you prevent getting infected with BV?

We cannot tell you how to prevent being infected until it is known what causes it, however condoms protect you from sexually transmitted infections.

How is BV diagnosed?

BV is easily tested for with a vaginal swab that can either be collected by your doctor or collected yourself at the clinic or at home as part of this study.

Can BV be cured?

Antibiotics are reasonably effective for the treatment of BV, and include either a 7 day course of an antibiotic called metronidazole or a 7 day course of a vaginal cream called clindamycin. Some women may find that their symptoms return within a few months of treatment and should see their doctor.

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