

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

BACKGROUND

BV is a condition in women where the balance of bacteria normally found in the vagina is disrupted. The cause of this imbalance is not fully understood. BV is not a sexually transmitted disease in the conventional sense – any woman can get BV, even those who have never had sex. However, sexually active women are at increased risk of BV and the reasons for this are unclear.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Some women have no symptoms
- Strong “fishy” vaginal odor, especially after sex
- Abnormal vaginal discharge – white or grey, watery or foamy
- Pain during urination
- Vaginal itching

TRANSMISSION

It is unclear what causes the imbalance in vaginal bacteria that leads to BV. However, some behaviors can increase a woman’s risk of BV:

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

COMPLICATIONS

- In pregnant women, having BV can increase risk of preterm birth and low birth weight.
- Having BV makes it easier to transmit or acquire HIV during sex.

PREVENTION

- Avoiding vaginal sex may reduce a woman’s risk of getting BV.
- Limit the number of sex partners.
- To maintain “healthy” vaginal bacteria, do not douche.

TESTING AND TREATMENT

- Get a test from a medical provider if infection is suspected.
- BV can be cured using medication prescribed by a medical provider.
- Male sex partners do not need to be treated at the same time.

NOTE: BV can recur after treatment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Minnesota Department of Health
STD and HIV Section
(651) 201-5414; (651) 201-5797 TTY
www.health.state.mn.us/std

Minnesota Family Planning and STD Hotline
1-800-783-2287 Voice/TTY; (651) 645-9360 (Metro)
www.sexualhealthmn.org

American Social Health Association (ASHA)
www.ashastd.org

CDC National STD and AIDS Hotlines
1-800-CDC-INFO; 1-888-232-6348 TTY
www.cdc.gov/std