

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) What You Need to Know

What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a common type of vaginitis. It is an infection of the vagina.

It is normal for a woman to have some clear or white discharge from her vagina. When she has vaginitis, this discharge changes. There may be more of it, or it may have a different color or smell.

If you have BV, you may have these signs:

- A heavy, milky discharge from your vagina
- A fishy-smelling discharge from your vagina that smells worse after sex
- Itching in your vagina

How did I get it?

It is normal for women to have different kinds of bacteria in the vagina. If one grows too much, you can get BV. Your chance of getting BV is higher if:

- You have a new sex partner or multiple sex partners.
- You and your partner do not use condoms when having sex.
- You clean inside your vagina with a douche.

You can't tell by looking at a woman if she has BV. The only way to know if you have BV is to be tested by a health care provider.

What should I do?

Get treated.

Your Family PACT provider will give you medicine that will cure the infection. They will give you pills to take or medicine that you put in your vagina.

If you think you may be pregnant, tell your provider before you start your treatment.

Follow all of your Family PACT provider's instructions.

- Use all of the medicine to treat the infection, even if the symptoms go away.
- Do not douche. Douching or washing out the vagina will not cure BV and may make you more likely to get BV again.
- Male partners do not spread BV, and they do not need to be treated. But, BV can spread sexually between women. If you have female sexual partner(s), they need to be treated too. Ask your Family PACT provider how you can get your partner treated.
- Go back to see your Family PACT provider for a follow-up visit if they recommend it.

Why should I get treated?

It is important to get treated for BV. If you don't:

- You may have a higher chance of getting a sexually transmitted disease (STD), such as chlamydia or HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).
- You can get an infection in your tubes and uterus.

If you are pregnant, BV could cause your baby to be born too soon.

Protect yourself!

- **Keep clean, but don't clean inside your vagina with a douche.** The vagina keeps itself clean on its own. Douching can wash away what the vagina needs to keep healthy.
- **Use cotton underpants.** Don't wear tight pantyhose. This helps to keep you cool and dry.
- **Always use a male or female condom when you have sex.** This can help keep you from getting vaginitis and other kinds of infections.
- **Ask your Family PACT provider about getting an HIV test.**
- **Ask your provider where you can get vaccines** that help protect against Hepatitis B and HPV infections.

Resources

To learn more about BV, call the CDC toll-free hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).

For information about the Family PACT program and providers near you, call 1-800-942-1054 or visit www.familypact.org.