

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is an imbalance of the naturally-occurring, healthy bacteria found in the vagina or internal genitals. When conditions change, certain bacteria can increase and create symptoms. Infections can only occur in a vagina/internal genitals.

BV can be treated with antibiotics.

Causes

It is not clear what causes the imbalance of bacteria, but there are some things make you more likely to get it. The chances of having BV are higher if you:

- have sex with new or multiple sexual partners
- have another sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- have an IUD
- smoke
- douche

Symptoms

If you have BV it is common to not notice any symptoms. Symptoms may include more vaginal discharge than usual and a fish-like smell. It can also cause irritation in the vaginal area.

Tests and Diagnosis

There are choices for how you test for BV. Testing is usually done with an exam and a swab. It is best to get tested for BV if you:

- have symptoms
- have a vagina/internal genitals and a sexual partner who has tested positive for BV

Window Period (how long to wait before testing):

Most test results are accurate once you have symptoms. In British Columbia, most test results should be ready in 10 days.

Treatment

BV is treated with prescription antibiotics. It is important to take all your medication as directed. If you miss any pills, the infection may not be successfully treated. See your health care provider if this happens, or if you still have symptoms a week after starting treatment.

The medications used to treat BV are available for free in BC. Talk to your health care provider to see if they have them in stock.

Sexual Partners

Only partners who have a vagina/internal genitals should get tested.

Complications

BV usually does not cause other health problems. However, it can lead to serious complications including:

- higher chance of getting and passing HIV
- pelvic inflammatory disease

Pregnancy: Tell your health care provider if you are pregnant and have BV, as it can cause some complications during pregnancy.

Prevention

It is a good idea to be tested regularly for STIs, especially if you have new sexual partners or open relationships. Talking with partners about safer sex makes sure everyone knows what to expect. Condoms are great if they work for you – the correct use of condoms can reduce your chances of getting and passing BV.

Resources

HealthLink BC – Information about BV in multiple languages

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/bacterial-vaginosis>

SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about BV

<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>