

Fact Sheet: Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

What is Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)?

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is one of the most common vaginal infections in child-bearing aged women. Women who are sexually active are more likely to get BV. Pregnant women have high rates of BV, which if not treated, can lead to premature or low-birth weight babies.

What are the symptoms?

- Some women do not have symptoms.
- Unpleasant vaginal odor.
- Abnormal discharge from the vagina, usually a white or gray color.

How is it spread?

It occurs when the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina is disrupted. Why this happens is not known. You are more likely to get BV if you have a new sex partner or multiple sex partners, or douche. Women do not contract BV from toilet seats, bedding, swimming pools, or from touching objects around them.

How is it diagnosed?

A healthcare provider must examine the vagina for signs of BV and perform laboratory tests on a sample of vaginal fluid to diagnose BV.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self -diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

How is it treated?

- BV is treated with a course of antibiotics. Treatment is especially important in pregnant women in order to avoid complications.
- Male partners do not need to be treated, but BV may spread between female sex partners.
- BV often comes back after treatment.

It is very important that you:

- Take all medicines as prescribed, even if you start to feel better.
- Inform your health care provider if you think that you may be pregnant before taking any medications.

How is it prevented?

- **Don't have sex.** You cannot give or get a sexually transmitted disease (STD) if there is no contact with the penis, vagina, mouth or anus.
- **Limit your number of sexual partners.** The more people you have sex with, the greater the chance of getting an STD.
- **If you choose to have sex, be prepared.** Have condoms with a water-based lubricant on hand and use a new condom every time you have sex.
- **Have regular exams if you are sexually active.** If you think you have an STD, get tested. Ask your partner(s) to get tested.
- **Do not douche.**
- **Remember: a Pap smear is not a test for STDs.** Ask to be tested if you are at risk.
- **Telling your partner.** Tell anyone you have had sex with that they need to be tested.

