

Bacterial vaginosis

Also known as BV

Bacterial vaginosis is a bacterial infection caused by a change in the normal balance of vaginal bacteria.

QUICK FACTS

- BV usually only happens in people who have sex
- BV often has no symptoms
- BV may be caused by having sex; it's not yet known if it can be transmitted by sex
- BV is usually treated with antibiotic tablets or a vaginal antibiotic cream

What is this?

The healthy vagina contains many different types of bacteria.

With bacterial vaginosis (BV), there is a change in the balance of these bacteria, with some increasing and others decreasing. This may result in an unpleasant odour, discharge or both.

The actual cause of BV remains unclear and is the subject of current research studies.

How do you get it?

Sexually active people are more likely to get BV. However, we don't know if BV is actually transmitted through sex, or whether it is sexual activity itself that causes BV.

Studies have shown that certain practices are associated with an increased risk of developing BV, including:

- a change in sexual partner
- not using condoms or other barrier method consistently
- having a sexual partner with a vagina
- douching

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- strong vaginal odour

- increased or a change in vaginal discharge
- vaginal discomfort

How do you test for it?

BV is diagnosed by a combination of examination and microbiological findings.

How is it treated?

BV is usually treated with an oral antibiotic or a vaginal antibiotic cream for 7 days.

For 50% of people, these treatments can get rid of BV.- However, for up to 50% of others, BV will come back within a year of treatment.

A longer treatment of vaginal antibiotics can be used to treat BV which keeps coming back.

Are there any complications if not treated?

BV is a common condition and many people with BV do not suffer from any complications.

However, BV has been linked with early pregnancy loss, premature delivery and low birth weight of infants, [pelvic inflammatory disease \(PID\)](#) and an increased risk of getting a sexually transmissible infection.

Is it likely to come back after treatment?

Nearly half the people who are treated for BV experience recurrence. If symptoms come back after treatment, see your doctor.

How can I protect myself?

Right now, we cannot tell people what they can do to avoid getting BV. While condoms and dams may help you avoid BV, they are not completely protective.

Where can I get help?

- Visit a [sexual health service near you](#)
- Visit your local doctor
- Visit your local community health centre

DISCLAIMER

This fact sheet provides general sexual health information and is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor.

If you have concerns about your health, you should seek advice from your doctor.

If you require urgent care, you should go to your nearest Emergency Department or call [000](tel:000).