

# Bacterial Vaginosis

## 1. What is bacterial vaginosis (BV)?

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is an infection that affects the vagina. BV is most common in people who have a vagina aged 15 through 44. Although it can be related to sexual activity, BV is not considered a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

## 2. What causes BV?

The vagina is home to many kinds of bacteria (germs) that keeps it healthy and balanced. Some kinds of bacteria are “good” while others are “bad.” The good bacteria helps keep the vagina a little bit acidic, which stops the bad bacteria from growing too fast. BV is caused by the growth of bad bacteria that live in the vagina. When these bad bacteria grow too fast, this unbalances the vagina and leads to BV.

It is unclear what exactly causes BV, but there are some things that may be connected to bacteria growth. Some things that may increase someone’s risk of getting BV includes douching, use of intrauterine devices (IUDs), greater number of sexual partners, and/or having another STI.

## 3. What are the symptoms of BV?

Most people with BV don’t have symptoms, which means they may not know they have it.

If symptoms do appear, they may include:

- Strong “fishy” smell from the vagina (after sex or during your period)
- Thin, white, or gray discharge
- Pain, itching or burning in the vagina
- Itching around the outside of the vagina
- Burning when you urinate (pee)

## 4. How is BV treated?

BV can be treated and cured with medicine prescribed by your doctor. It’s important to take all the medicine as instructed and don’t share your medication with anyone. Remember to take all the medicine, even if you feel better, to make sure the infection is treated correctly.

## 5. How can I prevent BV?

- Do not douche.
- Wipe from front (vagina) to back (anus).
- Wear cotton or cotton-lined underwear and avoid tight fitting pants.
- If you are pregnant, seek early prenatal care to prevent health problems for you and your baby.



### Key Points

- BV is an infection most common among people aged 15 through 44 who have a vagina.
- Most people don’t have symptoms of BV.
- BV is curable!

### For more information:

Los Angeles County  
Department of Public  
Health

[www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/InfoForYou.htm](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/InfoForYou.htm)

Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
(CDC)

[www.cdc.gov/std/bv/stdfact-bacterial-vaginosis.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/std/bv/stdfact-bacterial-vaginosis.htm)