

Bacterial Vaginosis

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The vagina contains many types of bacteria. Bacterial vaginosis occurs when the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina is disrupted. Bacterial vaginosis is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI), but having new or multiple sex partners can change the balance of bacteria in the vagina.

Symptoms

Many people with bacterial vaginosis have no symptoms. If symptoms occur, they can include:

- Gray discharge
- Foul-smelling vaginal odor (especially after sex)
- Itching or swelling in or around the vagina
- Burning during urination

Prevention

Avoid vaginal douching — this may lead to infections such as bacterial vaginosis. Having new or multiple sex partners likely increases the risk of bacterial vaginosis.

Testing

Health care providers can test for bacterial vaginosis with a sample of vaginal fluid.

Treatment

Bacterial vaginosis is treated with pills or vaginal gel.

Why Get Treatment

If left untreated, bacterial vaginosis may increase the risk of getting an STI like chlamydia, gonorrhea or HIV.

Sex Partners

Because bacterial vaginosis is not an STI, you will not spread the infection to your sex partner(s). However, if they experience any symptoms of bacterial vaginosis they should see a health care provider.

Bacterial Vaginosis and Pregnancy

Pregnant people with symptoms of bacterial vaginosis should be tested as soon as symptoms appear.

Bacterial vaginosis can cause premature birth and infection of the womb after delivery.

New York City Sexual Health Clinics provide confidential, low- to no-cost services including STI and HIV testing.

To find a clinic, visit nyc.gov/health/clinics.

