VAGINAL DISCHARGE - Bacterial Vaginosis (BV), Yeast Infection and Trichomoniasis (Trich)

What is bacterial vaginosis (BV)

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is an overgrowth of the normal vaginal bacteria commonly found in sexually active individuals. BV is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can appear and disappear with your period. Symptoms include:

- White or grey vaginal discharge
- Fishy odor from the vagina
- Mild vaginal itching or burning can occasionally occur

How do I get tested?

Swabs are taken from the vagina. BV can be diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms.

How is it treated?

BV is treated with antibiotics. If you do not have symptoms, treatment is not necessary unless you are pregnant or are planning to have a gynecological procedure such as an intrauterine device (IUD) insertion or an abortion.

How can I prevent bacterial vaginosis?

Some individual will continue to get BV regularly. However, here are some tips that may help:

- Avoid douching and using other hygiene products such as sprays, scented soaps, tampons and pads
- Using condoms may decrease BV recurrence

Are there complications?

During pregnancy, BV may increase the risk of premature rupture of the membranes, pre-term delivery and having a low birth weight baby.

What is a yeast infection?

A yeast infection is an overgrowth of normal flora that can be found on the skin, in the gastrointestinal tract from the mouth to the anus and the vagina. A yeast infection
is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Anyone can develop a yeast infection. Yeast infections and having an overgrowth of yeast are not serious conditions.

**What are the symptoms?**

- White, watery or thick discharge from the vagina
- Vaginal itching and/or soreness
- Redness and/or burning on the vulva
- Burning when urine touches the vulva
- Pain with intercourse
- Red spots with whitish patches or a rash on the glans (head), foreskin and/or shaft of the penis
- Dry, flaky and/or itchy skin of the penis
- Redness, swelling and/or irritation of the genital area

**How do I get tested?**

If you have a vaginal yeast infection, swabs are taken from the vagina or penis. Yeast infections can be diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms, but it is best to have a swab taken to ensure it is not any other infection or STI.

**How is it treated?**

- Only yeast infection symptoms need to be treated. Overgrowth of yeast is treated with antifungal medication. The following medications can be purchased at pharmacies without a prescription:
  - Vaginal cream, tablets or suppositories inserted in the vagina
  - Antifungal cream that is applied to the genital area
  - Oral medication

**How can I prevent yeast infections?**

- Avoid douching and using hygiene products such as sprays, scented soaps, tampons or pads, and bath products.
- Avoid clothing that can trap moisture and alter the vaginal environment, such as pantyhose, synthetic underwear and other tight fitting clothing. It is recommended to wear cotton underwear.
- Factors that contribute to yeast infections are hormonal changes (pregnancy, menstruation and birth control pills), diabetes, antibiotics and oral sex.

**What is trichomoniasis?**

Trichomoniasis vaginalis (also known as trich) is a parasite that can live in the vagina and urethra (opening on the penis). It can survive for a short period of time outside the body.
How is it transmitted?
Trichomoniasis is transmitted through unprotected vaginal and anal intercourse with an infected partner.

What are the symptoms?
- Fishy odour
- Frothy yellowish vaginal discharge
- Itching and redness of the vulva and/or vagina
- Burning with urination
- Slight discharge from the penis and discomfort while urinating

How do I get tested?
- Trichomoniasis is diagnosed by a health care provider based on symptoms; swabs are taken from the vagina or penis to confirm.

How is it treated?
- Trichomoniasis can be treated and cured with oral antibiotics.
- It is important not to have sexual contact during treatment and for seven days after treatment.
- Make sure that your partner(s) is treated before resuming any sexual activity.
- You can be re-infected after treatment.
- When testing for trichomoniasis, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) must be considered, and additional testing for other STIs should be done.

Remember: Any infection in the genital areas may increase the risk of becoming infected with HIV. Practicing safer sex, by using latex or polyurethane condoms and/or oral dams for oral, anal or vaginal sex can reduce the risk of sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBIs).

Call the Sexual Health Infoline Ontario at 1-800-668-2437 if you have questions or need help.

For more information:

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