

Title: Bacterial Vaginosis: What is there to know?

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Abstract:

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is an infection caused when the naturally occurring bacteria in a woman's vagina become imbalanced. BV is linked to sexual activity with men and women. Women who have sex with women have unique risk of getting BV like sharing sex toys with partners. WSW who have BV are more likely to have a partner who also has it.

BV frequently has no symptoms and it is treated with antibiotics. WSW can decrease their chances of getting BV by practicing safer sex, washing sex toys between users.

Read more about BV in this easy to read FAQ-style handout!

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## **Bacterial Vaginosis: What is there to know?**

*Bacterial vaginosis (BV) occurs when the bacteria that naturally live in the vagina become imbalanced.*

Normally there is a healthy balance of bacteria in any woman's vagina. In certain circumstances some types of bacteria can overgrow and cause an infection.

### What causes the BV infection?

Many activities seem to add to a woman's chances of getting BV. Most commonly, it is **linked to sex** including vaginal and oral sex, with either men or women. In other instances women who douche, share sex toys, or have multiple partners may be at risk. Lifestyle factors like smoking may also play a part.

### Is BV a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Good question! Doctors are still trying to figure this out, especially how it relates to WSW. What we do know now is that BV is linked to having sex and could be **spread through vaginal secretions** in women who have sex with women (WSW).

### What happens when you have BV?

Some women have a grayish discharge and smell a "fishy" discharge. Other women have no symptoms.

### If I have BV will my partner have BV?

Maybe. The chances of your partner having BV are higher if you have BV. She should probably get tested, especially if the symptoms bother her.

### What can I do to get rid of BV?

Your doctor or medical provider can prescribe an **antibiotic**. Sometimes the antibiotic treatment does not work the first time, so if you feel symptoms are not gone, go back to your doctor for another check-up.

### Does BV make me more at risk for other STI's?

Yes. It changes the natural balance of your vagina making you more likely to get infections like herpes or HIV if you are exposed to them. If you get pregnant it can cause problems with the pregnancy.

### What can I do to protect myself?

**Use safer sex practices** including dental dams and rubber gloves during sex. Use separate sex toys or if sharing toys, place a condom on them for each user. Always wash sex toys with warm soapy water after use. There is some link to other non-sex activities, such as smoking, douching. So limit those activities as well.

### Is BV a yeast infection?

No. A yeast infection is not caused by bacteria. They are treated differently.

### Where do I go for more information?

*Websites that may be helpful include:*

<http://www.cdc.gov/std/bv/stdfact-bacterial-vaginosis.htm>

[http://www.medicinenet.com/bacterial\\_vaginosis/page3.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/bacterial_vaginosis/page3.htm)

**Contact your doctor, nurse, or other medical professional with other questions!**