

# Family Planning

## Welfare Association of NT Inc.

ABN 38 812 238 738

*Family Planning Welfare Association of the NT Inc exists to provide quality health care and education services in sexual and reproductive health*

# BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS

Bacterial vaginosis, sometimes known as BV or Gardnerella, is a common condition in women.

## CAUSE?

The cause of BV is not fully understood.

BV is associated with an imbalance in the bacteria that are normally found in a woman's vagina. The vagina normally contains mostly "good" bacteria, and fewer "harmful" bacteria.

BV develops when the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina is disrupted and replaced by an overgrowth of certain bacteria.

Not much is known about how women get BV. There are many unanswered questions.

Any woman can get BV. However, some activities or behaviours can upset the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina and put women at increased risk including:

- Having a new sex partner or multiple sex partners,
- Douching,
- Using an intrauterine device (IUD) for contraception.

It is not clear what role sexual activity plays in the development of BV. Women do not get BV from toilet seats, bedding, swimming pools, or from touching objects around them. Women that have never had sexual intercourse are rarely affected.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- Vaginal itching
- Thin or watery, grey or white vaginal discharge
- Fishy smelly vaginal discharge often worse after unprotected vaginal sex or during menstruation)

Some women with BV report no signs or symptoms at all.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE IT?

Bacterial vaginosis is diagnosed by taking a swab from the vagina. It is sent to the pathology for testing. To organise testing contact your GP, Family Planning or a sexual health clinic.

## **WHY TREAT?**

In most cases, BV causes no complications. But there are some serious risks from BV including:

- Having BV can increase a woman's susceptibility to HIV infection if she is exposed to the HIV virus.
- Having BV increases the chances that an HIV-infected woman can pass HIV to her sex partner.
- Having BV has been associated with an increase in the development of an infection following surgical procedures such as a hysterectomy or termination of pregnancy.
- Having BV while pregnant may put a woman at increased risk for some complications of pregnancy.
- BV can increase a woman's susceptibility to other STI's

## **TREATMENT**

If you have no symptoms treatment may or may not be offered. If you do have symptoms and would like treatment speak with your doctor about antibiotics

## **MALE PARTNERS**

Treatment of male partners is not generally recommended and does not reduce the incidence of recurrent episodes. BV is not found in males

## **PREVENTING BV**

The following basic prevention steps can help reduce the risk of upsetting the natural balance of bacteria in the vagina and developing BV:

- Be abstinent
- Limit the number of sex partners.
- You should always insist that casual male partners use a condom
- Do not douche.
- Use all of the medicine prescribed for treatment of BV, even if the signs and symptoms go away.

**BV can recur after treatment**

## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Family Planning on 8948 0144

NT Health Direct on 1800 022 222