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Student Health Services
Bacterial Vaginosis

Definition: Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a mild infection in the vagina that is caused by a type of bacteria called *Gardnerella Vaginalis* and other non-specific bacteria. A health vagina contains a large amount of good bacteria called lactobacilli and a few other types of bacteria called anaerobes. When a woman's lactobacilli are decreased the anaerobes will take over and cause bacterial vaginosis. Bacterial vaginosis is the most common vaginal infection in the United States. Women often think they have a yeast infection and try over-the-counter creams which do not resolve their symptoms and may worsen them.

Cause: Women often get bacterial vaginosis due to an imbalance in the good bacteria that are found in a health vagina. There are definite contributing factors that contribute to BV. It is important for women to know that you cannot get bacterial vaginosis from toilet seats, bedding, swimming pools, or touching objects around them.

- a. Increased stress (physical and emotional)
- b. Having a new or multiple sex partners (BV is not a sexually transmitted disease and it is uncertain why being sexually active contributes to this particular infection. Women who have never has sex usually do not have problems with BV.)
- c. Douching
- d. Using an intrauterine device (IUD) for contraception.

Signs and Symptoms:

- a. Abnormal vaginal discharge with an unpleasant "fishy" odor, especially after intercourse.
- b. Grayish thin or white discharge.
- c. Burning during and after urination.
- d. Itching around the outside of the vagina.
- e. Some women have no signs or symptoms.

Diagnosis: A health care provider will diagnose you according to your symptoms and pelvic exam. Usually, a simple laboratory test on your vaginal discharge or by using the "whiff" test. The "whiff" test is done by placing discharge and applying an enzyme that will cause a very strong "fishy" odor indicating BV to the provider.

Complications: Usually, bacterial vaginosis does not cause complications but it can increase a women's risk of having the following problems:

- a. BV can increase susceptibility to HIV if exposed due to persistent inflammation of the vaginal tissue.
- b. An HIV infected women with BV can pass HIV on to her partner.
- c. There is an increased risk of developing Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). Especially, women who have had a surgical procedure such as a hysterectomy or an abortion.
- d. BV can increase a woman's susceptibility to STD's such as Chlamydia and gonorrhea.
- e. Pregnant women with bacterial vaginosis can have premature babies and or low birth weight babies.

- f. BV can increase the risk of ectopic pregnancies (when the baby begins to grow in a fallopian tube) and the tube can rupture, which is a life-threatening problem. Or women can become infertile due to infection that has gone untreated and has gone into the fallopian tubes and caused excessive scarring.

Treatment: Sometimes BV will clear up without treatment. However, to avoid pelvic inflammatory disease women should be treated. Partners of women with BV do not necessarily need to be treated. Sometimes BV may spread between female sex partners. The most common treatment is antibiotic therapy. Flagyl (metronidazole) or clindamycin are very effective in treating BV and can be used on pregnant and non-pregnant women. It is important to remember that BV can recur after treatment.