

# Guide to Vaginal Health

## What is normal vaginal discharge (fluid)?

Normal vaginal discharge refers to the mucus-like fluid that helps keep your vagina clean and healthy. Normal discharge may leave a white or yellow stain on your underwear. The amount of discharge can change at different time in your cycle and varies from person to person.

## What are signs of a vaginal infection?

- Change in discharge (amount, smell, or color)
- Itchiness
- It burns when you pee, or you feel like you have to pee all the time
- Belly pain
- Anything else unusual around your vagina like a pimple, sore, or wart

Talk to your doctor if you have signs of an infection. Only a doctor can determine what type of infection you have.

## How can I help keep my vagina healthy?

- Drink 8-10 large glasses of water daily.
- Wash the outside of your vagina daily with lukewarm water and mild soap (Dove™, Cetaphil™, Neutrogena™)
- After urinating or a bowel movement, always wipe yourself from front to back.
- Never douche or use deodorant sprays or perfumed powders on your vagina. Do not use deodorant tampons.
- Wear cotton, well-fitting underwear. Do not wear thongs.
- Wear a pantliner if your discharge is bothering you.
- Change out of wet or damp clothing (like a bathing suit or leotard) as soon as possible.
- If you are sexually active, urinate after having sex. Always use condoms during sexual contact. Never have sex with someone who has any kind of discharge, pimple, sore, or wart on or near their penis.

<b>These are conditions which you <i>don't generally catch</i> from someone, but having sex may put you at higher risk to get them. Women who don't have sex can also get them.</b>			
<b>Condition</b>	<b>What are the symptoms?</b>	<b>How is it spread?</b>	<b>Is it curable?</b>
<b>UTI</b> (Bladder infection) <i>Bacteria</i>	Burning when urinating, urge to urinate frequently or after you've just urinated, fever, lower abdominal pain or back pain	Through bacteria coming in to close contact to the urethra (pee opening). It can also be caused by an STI.	Yes, with prescription antibiotics. It must be treated to prevent a serious kidney infection.
<b>Bacterial Vaginosis</b> (BV) <i>Bacteria</i>	Fishy/unpleasant vaginal odor, milky-white or grey discharge, vaginal itching and burning. Sometimes no symptoms.	Not completely understood. Douching and having multiple sex partners increases your risk.	Yes, with prescription medication. It must be treated to prevent other pelvic illnesses or problems with pregnancy.
<b>Yeast infection</b> <i>Yeast</i>	Thick cottage cheese-like, curdy discharge, vaginal itching and burning, redness, and irritation	Through an imbalance of the healthy organisms in the vagina. May occur while on antibiotics.	Yes, with over-the-counter internal cream or with prescription medications.
<b>Molluscum contagiosum</b> <i>Virus</i>	Tiny smooth/shiny bumps which can get irritated and appear anywhere on your body	Through skin-to-skin contact with someone who is infected	Yes, with prescription medications. May resolve on their own in months to years.

# Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs or STDs)

<b>Condition</b>	<b>What are the symptoms?</b>	<b>How is it spread?</b>	<b>Is it curable?</b>
<b>Chlamydia</b> <i>Bacteria</i>	Most often there are NO SYMPTOMS. Yellowish discharge, burning with urination, irregular bleeding between periods, swollen or tender testicles; can affect the eyes	Through unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex.	Yes, with a prescription antibiotic. It must be treated to prevent PID (Pelvic Inflammatory Disease), which damages the reproductive organs and can cause infertility.
<b>Gonorrhea</b> <i>Bacteria</i>	Most often there are NO SYMPTOMS. Yellowish discharge, burning with urination, irregular bleeding between periods, swollen or tender testicles; can affect eyes and joints	Through unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex.	Yes, with a prescription antibiotic. It must be treated to prevent PID (Pelvic Inflammatory Disease), which damages the reproductive organs and can cause infertility.
<b>Herpes</b> <i>Virus</i>	Most often there are NO SYMPTOMS or just a mild burning sensation. Blister-like, painful sores in the genital region or mouth.	By touching an infected area (which may not be noticeable), or having unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex.	No. Herpes is treatable with prescription medication, but it does not go away. People with herpes can be contagious even if they are not having an outbreak.
<b>Human Papillomavirus (HPV)</b> (Genital warts) <i>Virus</i>	2 subtypes of HPV cause most genital warts. Other subtypes cause cervical, anal, and oral cancer.	By touching an infected area (which may not be noticeable), or having unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex.	No. HPV is treatable with prescription medication, but it does not go away. The most common types of HPV can be prevented by a vaccination of 3 doses, recommended for males and females.
<b>Trichomonas</b> <i>Parasite</i>	Most often there are NO SYMPTOMS in men. Women may have Itching, irritation, redness, frothy or smelly discharge, painful or frequent urination, pain during intercourse, abdominal pain.	Through unprotected vaginal sex.	Yes, with prescription medication.
<b>Pubic lice</b> (Crabs) <i>Parasite</i>	Severe itching, small red bumps	Through any direct physical contact. Rarely through indirect contact by a shared object.	Yes. Clothes and bedding must also be cleaned.
<b>Syphilis</b> <i>Bacteria</i>	First stage: painless open sore on genitals or mouth. Second stage: rash, fever, swollen glands, sore throat, muscle aches. Final stage: damaged internal organs and central nervous system.	Through unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex, and through kissing if there is a lesion on the mouth.	Yes, with prescription medication.
<b>HIV/AIDS</b> <i>Virus</i>	There are often no symptoms early on. Weight loss, fatigue, night sweats/fever, cough, diarrhea, swollen glands, memory loss/confusion, depression.	Through unprotected vaginal, oral, and anal sex. Also by dirty needles, and mother-to-child during childbirth or nursing.	No. There are treatments which have greatly improved the health and survival of people with HIV. There is no vaccine.