

## Don't Ignore Common Infections

(NAPS)—A common problem for many women, bacterial vaginosis (BV), can be a serious health threat.

Unlike yeast infections, BV is caused by an overgrowth of bacteria and must be diagnosed by a health care provider and treated with prescription medications that are not available over-the-counter.

One in four women are affected by BV in their lifetimes and can experience vaginal symptoms like itching or burning, an unpleasant odor, and white or gray discharge. Of those women, an estimated 40 to 50 percent are asymptomatic. Many of these women do not recognize their symptoms or fail to communicate their symptoms to their health care providers.

If health care providers are not alerted to a patient's symptoms, they may not test for BV during gynecological exams and the infection can go untreated. Daron Ferris, MD, professor of family medicine, obstetrics and gynecology at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta and a member of the 3M National Vaginitis Association (NVA), answers questions about health risks associated with the infection.

### Q. Can BV cause serious medical problems?

A. Yes, if it is ignored or left untreated. Studies associate BV with pelvic inflammatory disease, inflammation of the cervix or lining of the uterus, infections after surgery, including risk of acquiring HIV and other STDs, and in some cases infertility.



### Q. Should women who are pregnant worry about BV?

A. Women who are pregnant, including women planning a pregnancy should be tested for BV. A recent study published in the British Medical Journal showed that women with BV in the early stages of pregnancy have a higher incidence of miscarriage by the end of their first trimester. During pregnancy, BV can cause pre-term labor and low birth weight. To avoid these complications, it may be a good idea for women to schedule a pre-conceptual visit with their health care providers to test for BV.

### Q. How can a woman prevent BV?

A. Douches, deodorant spray, scented tampons or strong soaps can trigger an infection. Women should avoid using these products. If abnormal symptoms occur, women are urged to seek medical attention for prompt treatment.

More information is available at [www.vaginalinfections.com](http://www.vaginalinfections.com) or by calling 1-800-BVNEWS.