

Vaginitis

What is vaginitis?

Vaginitis is the irritation or inflammation of your vagina, front hole, or vulva (the outer parts of your genitals near your vagina or front hole). Sometimes vaginitis is the result of a sexually transmitted infection (STI), but not always.

How common is it?

Vaginitis is very common and estimated to affect about one-third of people with a vagina or front hole in at some point during their lifetimes.

How do you get it?

Yeast infections, bacterial infections, trichomoniasis (a parasitic infection), lack of estrogen, friction from vaginal or front hole sex or masturbation, wearing tight pants/underwear, and irritation from hot tubs or swimming pools can all cause vaginitis.

How is it diagnosed?

We diagnose vaginitis by talking to you about your symptoms and sexual history, doing a physical exam, and looking at a sample of your discharge under a microscope. We may also do other tests, such as a urine test.

What are the symptoms?

Your vagina, front hole or vulva may be red, irritated, or swollen and you may have itching, burning or pain in that area. There may be pain or discomfort with vaginal or front hole sex, discharge that is unusually thick or smells bad, or stinging when you pee.

How do you prevent it?

You can do a few things to prevent vaginitis. Avoid scented products like lube and hygiene products. Do not douche your front hole or vagina, and only use clean water or mild, unscented soap to clean your genitals. Change pads or tampons every 4–8 hours if you use them. Clean your sex toys carefully. Keep anything that has touched or been in your butt away from your front hole or vagina.

How is it treated?

The treatment for vaginitis depends on its cause. Generally, vaginitis is easy to treat and cure. Treatment may include a cream, suppository, or oral medication.

Should my sex partners get treated too?

If your health care provider finds that you have trichomoniasis, an infection that can be transmitted between sex partners, people that you are having sex with should get tested and treated. If you have bacterial vaginitis (BV), it is possible that your sex partner may need to be treated for BV if they have a vagina or front hole.

Special considerations with HIV?

Having vaginitis may make it more likely that you acquire or transmit HIV infection (in the absence of PrEP, U=U, or other HIV prevention methods). Vaginitis is more common in people living with HIV with a vagina or front hole.

Sexual health services from San Francisco AIDS Foundation

Get free sexual health services including STI & HIV testing, PrEP, PEP, anal health care, harm reduction supplies, gender-affirming hormones & more.

We can test and treat vaginitis at Magnet, the sexual health clinic at San Francisco AIDS Foundation.

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