

Vulvovaginitis (Infection of the Vagina)

Vulvovaginitis is inflammation (soreness, tenderness) of the vagina and surrounding area. These infections can cause itching, burning on urination, and fluid leaking from the vagina. After the doctor performs tests to find out the cause of the infection, treatment is generally effective.

What is vulvovaginitis?

Vulvovaginitis, sometimes called just vaginitis, is fairly common in girls. Several types of infection can cause itching and soreness of the vagina and the vulva (the tissue at the entrance to the vagina). Younger girls may develop “nonspecific” vaginitis related to hygiene problems.

Many other types of infections, including with bacteria and parasites, are possible. Some types of vaginitis result from irritation, with no infection at all. Yeast (candidal infection) is an uncommon cause of vaginal infection in girls before puberty.

Most causes of vaginitis clear up rapidly with treatment. To make sure your child receives proper treatment, the doctor may need to perform tests to identify of the cause of the infection.

What does it look like?

The most common symptoms of vulvovaginitis are:

- Itching and redness in and around the vagina.
- Fluid coming from the vagina (discharge).
- Pain when urinating.
- Irritation from certain soaps or poor hygiene that may cause itching and soreness but no discharge.

What causes vulvovaginitis?

- The main cause of vulvovaginitis in young girls is probably poor hygiene, leading to contamination with fecal (bowel movement or BM) material. Bacteria causing vulvovaginitis include *Streptococcus*, *Escherichia coli*, and *Staphylococcus*. Pinworm infection may also occur.
- The vaginal area is very sensitive in young girls and may be irritated by many different things. Possible causes include certain soaps or detergents and tight clothing or underwear.
- In young girls, sexually transmitted diseases (for example, gonorrhea or infection with the bacteria *Chlamydia*

or the parasite *Trichomonas*) should lead to prompt evaluation for possible sexual abuse.

What are some possible complications of vulvovaginitis?

Usually none, but depending on risk factors for abuse, the doctor may check for sexually transmitted diseases.

What puts your child at risk of vulvovaginitis?

Infections and irritation of the vagina are common in young girls. For some girls, vaginitis is a frequently recurring problem. It usually clears up by the time your daughter reaches puberty.

Factors that increase the risk of vaginal infections include:

- Poor hygiene.
- Wearing tight clothing and underwear that does not allow for ventilation. In infants and toddlers, rubber pants or plastic-coated paper diapers may play a role.
- Using certain soaps and cosmetics, including douches and perfumed hygiene sprays.

Can vulvovaginitis be prevented?

- To reduce the risk of vulvovaginitis, avoid the risk factors listed above. Make sure your daughter changes her underpants every day. Cotton underpants provide the best ventilation.
- Teach your child how to keep her vaginal area clean. After bowel movements, girls should wipe backwards, away from the vagina.

How is vulvovaginitis treated?

Most causes of vulvovaginitis improve with simple treatments:

- Sitz baths: Have your daughter bathe sitting down in warm water, without soap or bubble bath.
- Make sure your child avoids things that may irritate the vaginal area, such as harsh soaps, perfumes, and tight clothes.
- Have your child practice good hygiene, and make sure she knows to wipe backwards after BMs, away from the vagina.

- If your daughter's vulvovaginitis seems more severe or doesn't go away, call your doctor's office. The doctor may perform a culture of the discharge from the vagina to find the exact cause of the infection. Proper antibiotic treatment can then be given to eliminate the infection.



When should I call your office?

Call our office if your daughter's symptoms (vaginal pain, itching, and discharge) do not get better with treatment or if they return after treatment.