



Vulvovaginitis

Information for patients

Published January 2011

www.britspag.org

What is vulvovaginitis?

Vulvovaginitis is a very common disorder affecting girls between the ages of two and seven years. It is inflammation of the vagina and vulva (private parts).

What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms are vaginal discharge and soreness. The discharge can be yellow or green and can be smelly. Other symptoms may include redness of the vulval area, itching, and pain when passing urine.

Please note: If any blood is noticed in the discharge, then please inform your doctor as further investigations are required.

What causes it?

Vulvovaginitis is usually caused by repeated infections with bugs that are a normal part of the body. They often live in the gut, bowel, nose or mouth. These bugs are easily transferred to the vulval area by young girls as they learn to be responsible for their own personal hygiene.

Other factors that make girls who have not yet gone through puberty more prone to infection in this area are:

- A lack of female hormones which make the vagina and vulva thin and less resistant to infection
- The vagina is not acidic like after puberty so bugs can easily grow and cause infection
- The vulva is very close to the anus (bottom) so making it easy to spread bugs from the bowel to the vulva
- The labia (lips) are flat and undeveloped and do not pose a barrier to infection

Are any tests necessary?

Sometimes your doctor may take a swab of the discharge from the outside of the vagina. This does not hurt. If there is pain on passing urine, a urine sample may be sent to look for infection. If any infection shows up on either of these tests, it may be treated with antibiotics.

Is there any other treatment?

There is no single treatment, and the condition will disappear when puberty is reached. There are some helpful tips until that time which may help to improve symptoms:

- Teach the child to wipe from front to back after using the toilet
- Make sure her bottom is completely clean after opening her bowels
- Teach her to pass urine with her legs apart
- Avoid bubble bath or scented soaps
- Wear cotton knickers and avoid tight-fitting clothing
- Avoid wearing underwear at night
- A barrier cream such as Sudocrem can be used if the skin is sore. Do not apply any other types of creams unless advised by your doctor
- Constipation can make the problem worse. Try to avoid it with a healthy diet, or if it is a problem, get it treated by your GP

Will the condition cause any long-term problems?

The infections associated with vulvovaginitis are different from those that adult women get and do not cause any problems with menstruation (periods) or fertility. There is no association with pelvic inflammatory disease or tubal damage.