

Over-the-counter test for vaginal infection just as good as the doctor's

April 18 2012, By Glenda Fauntleroy



For women with symptoms of the most common vaginal infection, a new study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* finds that an over-the-counter diagnostic test may be just as accurate as having a test performed by a clinician.

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is an infection caused by overgrowth of the naturally occurring [bacteria](#) in the [vagina](#), which produces symptoms of abnormal discharge and itching. BV affects about 21 million (29 percent) of U.S. women between the ages of 14 and 49, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Lead author Jill Huppert, M.D., of the division of pediatric and adolescent gynecology at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center,

said the goal of the study was to see how the accuracy of a self-test for BV compares to diagnostic tests performed by a clinician. BV can be detected through two methods—by testing for abnormal pH levels or testing for the enzyme sialidase that appears when BV bacteria is present.

In the study, 131 sexually active women between the ages of 14 and 22 received BV testing by a clinician during a pelvic exam and then took the self-tests. All participants followed the directions and performed the self-test correctly.

The study found that for detecting BV, results from the self-tests and clinician-performed tests were not significantly different. Huppert said the results show that over-the-counter BV tests, just as home pregnancy tests, could be increasingly used by women consumers.

“Home testing encourages people to take ownership of their health and removes barriers to care,” she added. “Ideally, home testing would be a call to take further action by seeing your doctor to review the results.”

Amy Sass, M.D., an adolescent medicine specialist at Children’s Hospital Colorado in Aurora, agreed that seeing a clinician for further evaluation or treatment after taking a self-test is a must.

“My concern is that while these tests check for [bacterial vaginosis](#), a sexually active adolescent can have a simultaneous sexually transmitted infection, such as chlamydia and gonorrhea, and I wouldn’t want her to assume that the reasons for her symptoms is simply BV if she’s at risk for these other conditions because of her behavior,” she said.

The researchers also found that participants’ trusted the BV self-test less than they trusted the clinician-performed test and their trust only increased after discussing their results with a clinician.

More information: Huppert JS, Hesse EA, et al. 2012. Accuracy and trust of self-testing for bacterial vaginosis. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. In Press.

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