

Trichomoniasis

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that affects people of all genders. Although symptoms are more common in people with vaginas. It is caused by a protozoan parasite called *Trichomonas vaginalis* and is a cause of vaginal infections and urethral infections in people with penises.

How do people get it?

As with other STIs, trichomoniasis is spread through sexual contact. People with vaginas contract trichomoniasis from infected partners with vaginas or penises while people with penises usually contract it only from partners with vaginas.

What are signs and symptoms?

Many people with vaginas with trichomoniasis have symptoms. In these people, it causes a frothy, yellow-green vaginal discharge with a strong odor.

The infection may also cause discomfort during intercourse and urination, irritation and itching of the female genital area, and in rare cases, lower abdominal pain can also occur. Symptoms usually appear within 5 to 28 days of exposure in women. In people with vaginas, the infection may result in an asymptomatic carrier state.

Most people with penises do not have symptoms. Symptoms may have irritation inside the penis, mild discharge or slight burning after urination or

ejaculation. The infection in people with penises is usually transient and lasts less than 10 days.

Are there medical complications?

Trichomoniasis in pregnant women is associated with premature rupture of the membranes and preterm delivery. The genital inflammation caused by trichomoniasis may also increase a woman's risk of acquiring HIV infection if she is exposed to HIV.

How is it diagnosed?

To diagnose trichomoniasis, a medical provider performs a physical exam and laboratory test. A pelvic exam can reveal small red ulcerations on the vaginal wall or cervix. A sample of vaginal fluid or urethral fluid is examined under the microscope to look for the disease-causing parasite. In difficult to treat cases, other laboratory testing is available. The parasite is harder to detect in people with penises. Partners with penises of infected people with vaginas should be treated without testing.

Trichomonas vaginalis has not been found to infect oral sites and rectal prevalence is low. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend oral or rectal testing.

How is it treated?

Trichomoniasis can be successfully treated with oral medications such as metronidazole and tinidazole. Sexual partners should be treated at the same time. People being treated for trichomoniasis should

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avoid sex until treatment is completed and they are free of symptoms.

Retesting for trichomoniasis approximately 3 months after treatment is recommended.

How can it be prevented?

It can be prevented by using condoms correctly with every sexual encounter, and limiting the number of sexual partners.