

Gynaecology Department

Vulvovaginitis

What is Vulvovaginitis?

Vulvovaginitis is a 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 include redness of the vulval area, itching and pain when passing urine.

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

What causes it?

Vulvovaginitis is usually caused by repeated infections with bugs that are naturally occurring in 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 skin of the vagina and vulva thin and less resistant to infection.
- The vagina is more susceptible to infections in childhood than after puberty. As hormonal changes after puberty don't let the bugs grow easily and cause infection.
- The vulva is very close to the anus (back passage) 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 passing urine, a urine sample may be sent to test for infection. If any infection shows up on either of these tests, it may be treated with antibiotics.

Is it a serious condition?

No, vulvovaginitis is a very common problem in young girls. It may recur now and then but will improve as the child gets older.

What is the recommended treatment?

There is no single treatment, and the condition will often disappear when puberty is reached. These are some helpful tips until that time which may help 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.
- A barrier cream such as Vaseline can be used if the skin is sore. Do not apply any other type of cream unless advised by your doctor.
- Constipation can make problems worse. Try to avoid it with a healthy diet or, if this is a problem, get it treated by your GP.
- Some children find that certain drinks (e.g. orange or blackcurrant juice) make the problem worse. If this is the case, they should be encouraged to drink plenty of water or alternative juices.
- Emollients can be used in addition to the above measures either as a soap substitute or moisturiser.
- Avoid contact of the vulval skin to soap, bubble bath, shampoo, perfumes, personal deodorants, wet wipes, detergents, fabric conditioners, and sanitary wear.

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 damage to fallopian tubes.

Contact details

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