

Trichomoniasis Fact Sheet

What is trichomoniasis and how do you get it?

Trichomoniasis, also called “trick,” is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). It is caused by a parasite that can be passed from one person to another. The parasite is sexually transmitted through penis-to-vagina intercourse or vulva-to-vulva contact with an infected partner. The vulva is the genital area outside the vagina. Women can get the disease from infected men or women.

While trichomoniasis is usually passed sexually, it may be picked up from contact with damp or moist objects such as towels, wet clothing, or a toilet seat, if the genital area gets in contact with these damp or moist objects.

What are the symptoms of trichomoniasis?

Many women do not have any symptoms, but still have the STD. If women do have symptoms, they usually appear 5 to 28 days after exposure and can include:

- yellow, green, or gray vaginal discharge (often foamy) with a strong odor
- discomfort during sex and when urinating
- irritation and itching in the genital area
- lower abdominal pain in rare cases

If you have any of these symptoms, stop having sex and contact your doctor right away.

Is there a test for trichomoniasis?

To tell if you have trichomoniasis, your doctor or nurse will do a pelvic exam and lab test. During the pelvic exam, your doctor may be able to see small red sores inside the vagina or on the cervix. Your doctor will also take a fluid sample from the vagina and look for the parasite under a microscope or send the sample to a lab for analysis.

How is trichomoniasis treated?

Trichomoniasis can usually be cured with the prescription drug, metronidazole (also called Flagyl), or with a related drug, tinidazole. Topical medicines, or medicines applied to the skin, may be used in people who are allergic to metronidazole and tinidazole. The topical medicines are less effective and may not cure you. They might, however, ease the symptoms.

All women and men diagnosed with trichomoniasis should be treated. Even without symptoms, it can be passed to others. People being treated for trichomoniasis should avoid sex until they and their sex partners complete

treatment and have no symptoms. Having trichomoniasis once does not protect a person from getting it again.

How is trichomoniasis prevented?

There are things you can do to protect yourself from trichomoniasis:

- **Don't have sex.** The best way to prevent trichomoniasis or any STD is to practice abstinence, or not having vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- **Be faithful.** Have a sexual relationship with one partner who has been tested for trichomoniasis and is not infected is another way to reduce your chances of getting infected. Be faithful to each other, meaning that you only have sex with each other and no one else.
- **Use condoms.** Protect yourself with a condom EVERY time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Condoms should be used for any type of sex with every partner. For vaginal sex, use a latex male condom or a female polyurethane condom. For anal sex, use a latex male condom. For oral sex, use a dental dam. A dental dam is a rubbery material that can be placed over the anus or the vagina before sexual contact.
- **Don't share swimsuits or towels.** The trichomoniasis parasite can live outside the body for up to 45 minutes and can be contracted through contact with damp or moist objects that have the parasite on them.
- **Know that some methods of birth control, like birth control pills, shots, implants, or diaphragms, will not protect you from STDs.** If you use one of these methods, be sure to also use a latex condom or dental dam (used for oral sex) correctly *every time* you have sex.
- **Talk with your sex partner(s) about STDs and using condoms.** It's up to you to make sure you are protected. Remember, it's YOUR body! For more information, call Preventive Medicine Department at 953-8809/8810.
- **Talk frankly with your doctor or nurse and your sex partner(s) about any STDs you or your partners have had.**