

## **Vulvovaginitis**

### **What is it?**

Vulvovaginitis is inflammation of the skin around the vagina. It is most commonly found in girls aged two to seven years.

### **What symptoms can it cause?**

It most commonly causes vaginal discharge and soreness. The discharge can be yellow or green and can be smelly. It can cause soreness and itchiness. The skin around the urethra (where urine is passed) can also be inflamed so there may be some soreness on passing urine. It DOES NOT cause vaginal bleeding.

### **What is it due to?**

It is due to recurrent infections with germs that are a normal part of the body. These germs usually come from the gut. The vaginal skin in young girls is particularly prone to infections for several reasons. The body does not make oestrogen in girls before puberty and this leads to thinning of the vaginal skin. The anatomy of girls before puberty also means that the vagina is very close to the anus. In addition, the labia (lips of the vagina) are very flat and thin and do not develop properly until puberty. Vulvovaginitis often starts when the child becomes responsible for looking after themselves in the toilet and may be less good at hygiene.

### **Are there any tests necessary?**

Your doctor may take a swab (like a cotton bud) from the outside of the vagina. If there is any stinging on passing urine they may also take a urine sample to check for infection.

### **Can it be treated?**

There is no single treatment and the symptoms can be hard to cure. Treatment is based on prevention of further infections. Simple measures are given in *Fact Sheet 2*. If these are not helpful, occasionally your doctor may suggest a short course of oestrogen cream. This is usually given at night three times a week for up to a month. This can cause the skin to improve in strength and can sometimes help stop the pattern of recurrent soreness and infection. It cannot be given longterm. The symptoms always improve as puberty approaches usually from the age of eight years.

### **Can it cause any longterm problems?**

Vulvovaginitis always gets better at puberty. It does not cause any longterm problem and cannot cause any difficulty with menstruation, fertility or sexual intercourse.

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The following simple measures should help improve the symptoms. They will not provide an instant cure. They do need to be continued and to become part of your daughter's normal daily routine.

- Make sure whenever possible your daughter's bottom is thoroughly cleaned after opening her bowels. (This can be difficult at nursery or school)
- Always wipe from front to back after passing urine or opening the bowels. Teach your daughter to do this herself.
- Avoid bubblebaths and perfumed soaps. Use hypoallergenic soaps (marketed for sensitive skin). If possible use non-biological washing liquid for underclothes.
- Use cotton underwear.
- Avoid wearing underwear at night (loose pyjama bottoms or nighties are best).
- Avoid constipation.
- A bland cream such as E45 or Sudocrem can be used if the skin is sore. This is best applied at night. Do not apply Canesten cream unless advised to by your doctor.
- Avoid tights and leggings when possible.