Vulvovaginitis in children

(Inflammation of the vagina and lips outside of the vagina)

If you need more advice please contact:

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Ref: 0172  Date: 03/2016  Review: 03/2019
What is Vulvovaginitis?
Vulvovaginitis is a term for a fairly common condition which affects little girls where the vagina and outside lips of the vagina become inflamed.

In this condition there is redness and soreness between the legs with possible itching and there is often a yellow or green smelly vaginal discharge which may stain the pants.

The condition is commonest between the ages of 3 to 10 years when children have more control over their own personal hygiene. It is important to teach and practice good personal hygiene at home, nursery and in school.

What causes it?
Vulvovaginitis is usually caused by repeated infections with bugs that are normal part of 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 vagina and vulva thin and less resistant to infection.

• The vagina is not acidic like after puberty so bugs can easily grow and cause infection.

• The vulva is very close the anus (bottom) 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.

How can you help reduce and prevent this condition?
In order to prevent this condition from getting worse the following measures are advised:

• Good toilet hygiene. Always wipe from front to back after using the toilet and continue wiping until the toilet paper is clean.

• Make sure that the child is encouraged to pass urine with the legs spread apart.

• A daily warm bath or shower is advised. Unscented bubble baths or plain unperfumed soaps may be used. The area should be dried carefully by patting with a soft towel.

• It is best to wear cotton pants and to avoid tight clothes such as leggings or jeans.

• Avoid wearing pants in bed.

• A barrier cream such as sudocrem can be used if the skin is sore. Do not apply any other kind of creams until advised by your doctor.

What do I do now?
If the condition worsens or there is blood in the discharge please inform your own GP as further investigations may be indicated. The GP can make an appointment for the Paediatric and Adolescent Gynaecology Clinic.

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), fertility or sexual intercourse.

If you have further questions, please contact the secretary of Mrs. Latthe at the Birmingham Women’s Foundation NHS Trust (0121 627 2672).