

# Health Trends

## Don't Self-Diagnose: See A Doctor First

(NAPSA)—A nationwide survey of hundreds of African American women suggests that women's gynecological health is too often not given the priority it deserves.

Fortunately, by publicizing these concerns, African American leaders are hoping to change these statistics.

"Black women are the primary health care decision makers for the entire family and often delay seeing a doctor to care for their own health care needs, including gynecologic health," said Dr. Lorraine Cole, President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Black Women's Health Project.

Women need to see a doctor when suspecting any type of vaginal infection. Only a doctor can give an accurate diagnosis right away, provide treatment options and help prevent unnecessary and easily avoidable complications, The National Black Women's Health Project said.

The survey results, from close to 2000 women across the country, indicated that African American women reported more cases of vaginal yeast infections (65 percent) compared to other groups of women (Caucasian, 54 percent, and Hispanic, 53 percent). However, one third of African American women did not seek a doctor's care for proper diagnosis and treatment of this common condition. The survey showed that nearly one-third of these women self-medicated what they suspected was a vaginal yeast infection.

Self-diagnosis of infections can be a serious health risk. Women can easily misdiagnose themselves because yeast infections share similar symptoms with other types of infections, such as bacterial vaginosis and trichomoniasis. If left untreated, these prob-



**The National Black Women's Health Project is urging more women to avoid possible health risks by seeing their doctor for certain infections.**

lems may lead to long-term problems such as pelvic inflammatory disease, which can cause ectopic pregnancies or infertility.

A study published in *Obstetrics and Gynecology* found that two-thirds of women who bought over-the-counter treatments had inaccurately self-diagnosed their condition.

"It is disturbing to realize that such a large percentage of women risk pelvic inflammatory disease and even infertility by self-diagnosing and, consequently, misdiagnosing vaginal infections," Dr. Cole said. "With the launch of the national campaign to close the racial health gap, we hope to convey the importance of regular gynecologic visits, even when suspecting a vaginal yeast infection."

For more information regarding gynecological health, or the National Black Women's Health Project, you can visit the website at [www.BlackWomensHealth.ORG](http://www.BlackWomensHealth.ORG).