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Press release

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Vaginal microbiota: how healthcare professionals can help turn awareness into practical health habits

For the **fourth year running**, the Biocodex Microbiota Institute has commissioned Ipsos bva to conduct a major international survey on microbiota: the **International Microbiota Observatory**. This large survey was conducted by Ipsos bva among **7,500 people in 11 countries** (the USA, Brazil, Mexico, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Finland, China and Vietnam). Within each country, a **representative sample of the population aged 18 y.o. and over was interviewed**. Representativeness was ensured by the quota method applied to the respondent's gender, age, region and occupation. The survey was conducted online, from January from February 3rd to March 13th, 2026. Within this sample, **3,872 women were interviewed**.

Vaginal microbiota is essential for women's health. But how well do women understand it? What behaviors do they adopt to preserve it? What guidance do they receive from healthcare professionals?

Findings from this fourth edition show rising awareness of the vaginal microbiota; however, understanding of how it functions has not advanced significantly. Guidance from healthcare professionals remains limited. Strengthening and expanding this guidance is critical to empower women to adopt practices that support a microbiota-friendly lifestyle.



1. Vaginal microbiota is becoming more familiar — but still not fully understood

- **The recognition of the vaginal microbiota** among women is still on a **positive trajectory**: 56% are aware of the vaginal microbiome, an increase of 2 points since 2025.
- **However, only a small minority know precisely what it is.** Currently, **one in five women claim to have a precise understanding of it (23%)**. This in-depth awareness is consistent with the previous year, showing a slight decrease of 1 point compared to 2025. While the trend is encouraging, it appears that the depth of knowledge is still lacking.
- **Women's understanding remains robust on several key aspects**: 69% are aware of the adverse effects of antibiotics on the vaginal microbiota (-3 pts since 2025), 65% recognize the risk of vaginal dryness due to an imbalanced microbiota, 64% understand that the vaginal microbiota functions as a protective barrier (-2 pts since 2025), and the same proportion (64%) are aware that the vaginal microbiota is different from any other women (-2 pts since 2025).
- **Awareness in certain areas hasn't improved and remains limited.** Over half of women understand that the vaginal microbiota undergoes changes throughout a woman's lifetime (56%, -4 pts since 2025). Additionally, 57% are aware of the vagina self-cleaning function (-1 pt since 2025).
- **There are still notable knowledge gaps when it comes to understanding factors impacting the vaginal microbiota**, and once again no progress has been made over the past year. Only 50% of the women surveyed acknowledge that smoking has consequences on vaginal microbiota, and this awareness has dropped by 5 points since 2025. Moreover, only 45% of women are aware of the connection between the gut and vaginal microbiota, a figure that remains unchanged since 2025. Finally, only one in five women is aware of the protective effects of estroprogestative pills on the microbiota (21%; -1 point vs 2025).
- **Awareness regarding the pregnancy-related consequences of vaginal microbiota imbalance is low among women.** Only 37% are aware of the impact of childbirth (vaginally or cesarean section) on newborn's gut microbiota, reflecting a decrease of 4 points since 2025. Furthermore, women's knowledge about the impacts of an unbalanced vaginal microbiota is limited: only a minority acknowledge this impact on the risk of miscarriage or complication during pregnancy (49%) and the risk of preterm birth (45%).

2. The Guidance Gap persists: Women want answers about their vaginal microbiota – but too few receive practical advice

- **Healthcare professional guidance remains too limited, most women received little information from their healthcare professionals.** Only 36% recall receiving an explanation about the vaginal microbiota and its functions (–1 pt since 2025). Only 40% were educated on the importance of maintaining microbiota balance and a same proportion received practical guidance on the matter, reflecting 2 points decrease respectively since 2025.
- **Intimate health remains insufficiently addressed during medical consultations.** Only 47% of women report receiving guidance on the appropriate way to clean intimate areas. Furthermore, the impact of intimate hygiene products and other products such as sanitary pads, menstrual cups on the vaginal microbiota is discussed with fewer than half (47% and 42% respectively).
- **There is still a pressing need for better patient education and communication in all these areas. Besides, the demand for information is unequivocal.** An overwhelming 86% of women wish to receive more guidance from their healthcare providers about the vaginal microbiota and its health implications (+1 pts vs. 2025).
- **However, some women acknowledge that discussing intimate health issues with healthcare professionals can be challenging.** Two women in five do not find easy to speak about sexual discomforts with healthcare professionals (41%), 31% to discuss vaginal dryness and a quarter to address urinary or yeast infections (23%).

3. Vaginal microbiota-supportive behaviors: Partial uptake; harmful practices persist

While certain protective behaviors are well integrated into women's daily habits, others remain under-adopted, and practices that negatively affect vaginal microbiota persist.

- Three out of four women regularly wear cotton underwear (74%), and 69% avoid using deodorants or hygiene sprays on their intimate areas.

- **However, other protective behaviors are less widely adopted:** 44% report using soap-free cleansing solutions for intimate areas (several times a week), and only 32% sleep without underwear (several times a week).
- **Furthermore, certain harmful practices are still going on.** 58% of women tend to sometimes wash their body two or more times a day at least weekly, more than half (56%) opt for self-medication when experiencing irritation, itching, or burning sensations rather than consulting a healthcare professional. Additionally, 28% of women practice vaginal douching weekly.

4. Age: a key influence in understanding and protecting vaginal microbiota

This year again, women aged 60 and above are the least informed and aware about the vaginal microbiota. However, these older women still adopt protective behaviors for their vaginal microbiota.

- **Awareness remains notably lower among older women:** only 16% of those aged 60 and above know exactly what the vaginal microbiota is, compared to 23% of the general female population.
- **Significant knowledge gaps exist in several areas.** For example, only 50% of women over 60 are aware that the vagina is self-cleaning (compared to 57% of all women). Fewer are aware that smoking can affect the vaginal microbiota (45% vs. 50%). Like women in other age groups, they demonstrate more limited awareness of the influence of delivery mode on newborn's microbiota (31% vs. 37%) and the potential protective effect of oestroprogestative on vaginal microbiota (18% vs 21%).
- Moreover, this age group shows lower awareness of the potential impact of microbiota imbalance on STIs (62% vs. 67%), fertility (44% vs. 53%), risk of miscarriage and pregnancy complications (39% vs. 49%), and risk of preterm birth (35% vs. 45%).
- **Yet, among women aged 60 and older, awareness of some key topics is relatively high:** 71% know that antibiotics can disrupt the vaginal microbiota—higher than among younger women (60% among 25-34 yo); 61% recognize that each woman's vaginal microbiota is unique (vs 64% among all women); and 54% understand that it changes from childhood through menopause (vs 56% among all women).
- **Women aged 60 and more report adopting key behaviors that are beneficial for their vaginal microbiota.** A higher proportion regularly wear cotton underwear (80% vs. 74% overall) and avoid using deodorants in intimate areas (77% vs. 69%). The majority also refrain from vaginal douching (61% vs. 56% of all women).



- **However, some practices are not consistently better than average:** only 46% use a soap-free cleansing solution for intimate care several times a week (vs. 44% overall), and 28% wash their body several times a day— a habit that can disrupt the vaginal microbiota balance (vs. 25% overall).
- **Regarding healthcare professionals, women aged 60 and above are less likely to recall receiving information about the vaginal microbiota.** Only three in ten were educated on the importance of maintaining a balanced microbiota (29% vs. 40% overall), 28% on the behaviors that support this balance (vs. 40%), and only one in four received an explanation of what vaginal microbiota is and its functions (25% vs. 36%). This age group also received less guidance on proper intimate hygiene practices (39% vs. 47%) and the influence of hygiene products for intimate toilet on vaginal microbiota (38% vs. 47%).

Young women: still a stronger awareness of the vaginal microbiota however, it does not consistently translate into microbiota-friendly behaviors. It underscores the need to translate awareness into sustained, health-supporting habits to maintain the balance of the vaginal microbiota.

- Women aged 25 to 34 are more likely (31%) to know precisely what the vaginal microbiota is, compared to only 23% among all women.
- **Awareness of some key topics is relatively high.** They are more aware of the vagina self-cleaning capacity (61% vs. 57% among all) and better understand the impact of delivery methods on a newborn's gut microbiota (44% vs. 37%). Additionally, these women are more informed about the impact of imbalanced microbiota on fertility (58% vs 53%) and the risks of miscarriage or complicated pregnancies (53% vs 49%).
- **However, notable gaps remain:** while a majority know that the vaginal microbiota acts as a barrier against pathogenic microorganisms, awareness is lower than average (60% vs. 64%), and the same share understand that antibiotics can disrupt the vaginal microbiota, again below the overall average (60% vs. 69%).
- **However, women aged 25 to 34 report receiving more information from healthcare professionals than other women.** They have been more educated on the importance of maintaining a balanced vaginal microbiota (48% vs. 40% among all), on the beneficial behaviors needed to maintain this balance (49% vs. 40%) and about the nature and function of the vaginal microbiota (46% vs. 36%) during consultation. **However, these figures still fall below a majority, indicating that HCP-led education remains limited.**
- They also more frequently recall that HCPs provided guidance on intimate hygiene practices (53% vs. 47% among all), warned them about the effects of intimate hygiene products (53% vs. 47%), and other hygiene products such as sanitary pads, menstrual



cups (48% vs. 42%) on the vaginal microbiota. **Once again, while better than average, these levels remain only moderate, with roughly half of women receiving such guidance.**

- **Despite higher awareness and slightly more guidance from healthcare professionals, two harmful behaviors remain more common than among women overall:** 36% regularly use deodorants or hygiene sprays on intimate areas (vs. 25%), and 35% take vaginal douching at least weekly (vs. 24%). In addition, many prefer to self-medicate for irritation, itching, or burning in intimate areas rather than consult a healthcare professional (61% vs. 56%).

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About the Biocodex Microbiota Institute

The Biocodex Microbiota Institute is an international hub of knowledge dedicated to microbiota. The Institute educates the lay public and healthcare professionals on the importance of microbiota on healthcare and well-being.

www.biocodexmicrobiotainstitute.com/en

Press contact Biocodex Microbiota Institute:

Olivier Valcke, Director of the Biocodex Microbiota Institute
Global Microbiota Communication
+33 6 43 61 32 58
o.valcke@biocodex.com

Press contact Ipsos:

Etienne Mercier, **Director of Opinion and Health** – Ipsos Public Affairs
+33 6 23 05 05 17
Etienne.Mercier@ipsos.com