

Don't gamble

with your

SEXUAL

health

• WHY A CHECK UP IS IMPORTANT •





Introduction

Most infections caught through having sex can be treated easily and painlessly.

If you are worried that you have put yourself at risk, you should go to your GP or your local Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinic. Not all genital infections are caused by sexual contact, but they may still need treatment.

This leaflet explains the importance of having a check up, what happens at the clinic and highlights the symptoms of some of the most common sexually transmitted diseases (STIs).

There are four GUM clinics (also known as STI clinics) in Northern Ireland. You can find your nearest clinic from the list at the end of this leaflet. You may need to ring to make an appointment before you visit.

The staff at the GUM clinics are friendly and used to seeing people with concerns. Embarrassment is probably the most difficult thing they have to treat.

Reasons to have a check up

- it will help put your mind at ease;
- anyone who has vaginal, anal or oral sex can catch or spread sexually transmitted diseases (STIs);
- not everyone will develop symptoms;
- if not treated early, some STIs can do permanent damage to your health;
- if not treated early, you risk spreading the infection.

Remember most STIs are easy to treat. The clinic provides both treatment and medication - free of charge.

If you think you have an infection you should not have sex until you have had a check up. Both you and the person you had sexual contact with should go to a GUM clinic or your GP as soon as possible.

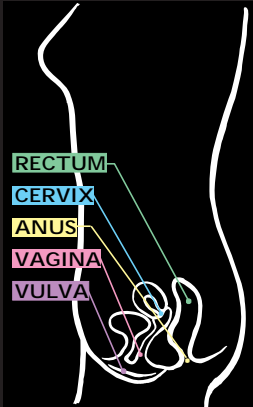


For women

What to look for:

- discharge from the vagina or anus;
- pain or stinging when passing urine;
- itchiness, soreness or redness around the vulva or anus;
- swelling of the vulva;
- blisters, ulcers or warts around the genital area or mouth;
- sore throat (after oral sex);
- bleeding after sex;
- abdominal pain.

Often women have no symptoms - that's why it's important to have a check up if you have taken a risk.

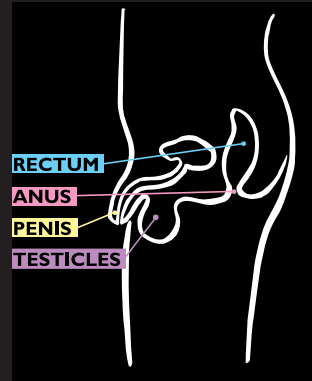


For men

What to look for:

- discharge or pus from the tip of the penis or anus;
- pain or a burning feeling when passing urine;
- itchiness, soreness or redness around the penis or under the foreskin;
- blisters, ulcers or warts around the genital area or mouth;
- sore throat (after oral sex).

Men should try not to pass urine for at least four hours before attending the clinic for a check up. This will help with tests to find out if there is an infection.





What do GUM clinics provide?

- a clinic where you do not need to be referred by another doctor, but where you may need to make an appointment (for details see list of GUM clinics);
- confidential testing and treatment for genital infections;
- confidential counselling and testing for HIV infection;
- medical, nursing and social support for people with HIV infection;
- vaccination for Hepatitis B;
- confidential advice and counselling on sexual health issues;
- information on contraception;
- safe keeping of your records within the department. No one, including your GP, your partner or insurance company can see them without your permission.

What happens at the clinic?

Some clinics have separate entrances for men and women. However, if you and your partner want to be seen together, mention this to the receptionist or nurse. On your first visit you will be given a clinic number. This number, not your name, is used on any tests carried out.

The doctor will ask you about any particular problems and then may:

- examine your genital area;
- take a sample of any discharge;
- ask you for a sample of urine;
- take a blood test (to check for Syphilis or Hepatitis B);
- ask you if you want a blood test for HIV (a health advisor will talk to you before you have the test).





Treatment

Most STIs are easy to treat. Treatment for each infection is different. It may include lotions, tablets or injections. It is important that the course of treatment is completed. You should follow any advice given by the doctor about not having sex during treatment.

Prevention

The spread of most sexually transmitted diseases can be reduced by:

- using a condom every time you have sex;
- limiting your number of sexual partners;
- having regular check ups.

Some common STIs

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is one of the most common STIs. Symptoms include a discharge from the vagina or penis or stinging when passing urine. Often there are no symptoms - that is why it is good to have a check up if you have taken a risk. If left untreated it could lead to infertility.

Non Specific Urethritis (NSU)

NSU is an inflammation of a man's urethra (the tube for passing urine). It can be caused by a number of germs. One of the most common is chlamydia. Symptoms may include a discharge from the tip of the penis or a burning feeling when passing urine.

Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea may cause a discharge from the vagina, penis or rectum, pain when passing urine or a sore throat. There may be no signs, especially when infection is in the throat or rectum.





Genital Warts

Genital warts are caused by a virus and are passed by skin to skin contact. They may appear as little lumps or spots on the skin or may cause an itch. Not all lumps or spots on the genitals are warts. However, if you are concerned, it's important to have a check up. Warts may appear anytime from two weeks to a year after contact with the virus.

There is a link between genital warts and cervical cancer. Women who have had warts should have a regular cervical smear. This test can help to find cell changes of the cervix usually years before cancer develops. These cell changes can be cured.

Genital Herpes

Herpes is caused by a virus. There are two types of virus - the first type causes sores around the mouth and nose (cold sores) and the second type causes sores in the genital area. Both are passed on by oral, vaginal or anal sex with someone who has sores at the time. There is a very small risk of passing the virus on when there are no sores present.

HIV

Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV is found in the blood, semen and vaginal fluids of an infected person. It can be passed on through unprotected penetrative sex, sharing needles to inject drugs and from a mother to her baby before, during or after birth.

Contact with STIs increases the risk of contracting HIV. A discharge or broken skin around the genital area make it easier for the virus to pass from an infected person to an uninfected partner.

Syphilis

Syphilis is spread during sex, including oral sex. Although half of those infected show no symptoms, painless but infectious sores may appear. These may clear up on their own but other symptoms, such as a rash, may develop later.

Syphilis can be easily diagnosed and treated with antibiotics. If left untreated it can lead to serious health problems, including damage to the heart, brain and nervous system.





Thrush

Thrush is a very common minor infection caused by a fungus. It often occurs during pregnancy or after a course of antibiotics. It can also be passed by sexual contact. It can cause a thick, white discharge from the vagina, itchiness or redness around the vulva, penis or anus. It can also cause pain during sex or when passing urine.

Anaerobic Vaginosis (Gardnerella)

Anaerobic Vaginosis is a common cause of vaginal discharge, related to an excess growth of bacteria in the vagina. Symptoms include a fishy smelling discharge which may be more noticeable after sex or during a period. Male partners do not get any symptoms. However, if they are also treated it may reduce the risk of the discharge returning to their female partner.

Genito Urinary Medicine Clinics in Northern Ireland

Royal Victoria Hospital *

Grosvenor Road, Belfast BT12 6BA.

Direct Line 028 9063 4050 or 9063 4054.

Health Advisor 028 9063 4557 or 028 9063 3953.

Clinic times:

Monday/Wednesday/Friday 8.30am-11.30,
1.30pm-3.00pm

Tuesday/Thursday 8.30am-11.00am.

Altnagelvin Hospital *

Anderson House, Glenshane Road

Londonderry BT47 1SB.

Direct Line 028 7161 1269.

Clinic times:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday
9.30am-11.00am

Monday 5.00pm-7.00pm

Wednesday 1.30-3.00pm

Causeway Hospital

Outpatients 2 Department

4 Newbridge Road, Coleraine BT52 1HS.

Direct Line 028 7034 6028.

Clinic times:

Tuesday at 5.30pm

Friday at 2.00pm

Daisy Hill Hospital *

5 Hospital Road, Newry BT35 8DR.

Direct Line 028 3083 5050.

Clinic times:

Wednesday 9.00am-11.00am.

* Please telephone to make an appointment.

For more information

If you would like more information on sexually transmitted infections or on safer sex or contraception, a range of free leaflets is available from the Central Health Promotion Resource Service in your local Health and Social Services Board area:

Eastern Health and Social Services Board area

Eastern Area Health Promotion
Communication Resource and Information
Service (CRIS)
Champion House, 12-22 Linenhall Street
Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 028 9032 1313.

Northern Health and Social Services Board area

Health Promotion Service
Homefirst Community Trust
Spruce House, Cushendall Road
Ballymena BT43 6HL.
Tel: 028 2563 5575.

Southern Health and Social Services Board area

Southern Area Health Promotion Department
Ward 1, St Luke's Hospital
Armagh BT61 7NQ.
Tel: 028 3752 0500.

Western Health and Social Services Board area

Health Promotion Department
Westcare Business Services
Resources and Graphics Centre
12c Gransha Park
Londonderry BT47 6WJ.
Tel: 028 7186 5221.

The HIV Support Centre

7 James Street South

Belfast BT2 8DN.

Freephone 0800 137437

(Monday-Friday 9.00am-5.00pm, 7.00pm-10.00pm
and Saturday 2.00pm-5.00pm).

Brook Belfast

29a North Street

Belfast BT1 1NA.

Tel: 028 9032 8866.

fpaNI

113 University Street

Belfast BT7 1HP.

Tel: 028 9032 5488.

2nd Floor, Northern Counties Building

Custom House Street

Londonderry BT48 6AE.

Tel: 028 7126 0016.



Health
Promotion
Agency



Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland

18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.

Tel: 028 9031 1611 (Voice/Minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711.

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk