

This factsheet summarises the use of family planning clinics in Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2003. Statistics for the use of family planning services provided by GPs are not collected centrally.

Key issue

All contraceptive advice provided by the NHS and all prescribed supplies are available free of charge, irrespective of age or marital status.

Family planning and the National Health Service (NHS)

Article 12 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 required the Ministry of Health, now the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), to arrange the provision of family planning services in Northern Ireland. From 1 April 1974, all contraceptive advice provided by the NHS and all prescribed supplies were made available free of charge, irrespective of age or marital status.

General practitioners joined the NHS family planning service from 1 July 1975, on reaching an agreement with the DHSS on an item-of-service payment each year, for every female patient consulting about contraception. The vast majority of the province's GPs provide a contraceptive service. The agreement specifically excluded the prescribing of condoms, and some GPs on moral grounds do not prescribe the IUD or emergency contraception.

The principal aims of a comprehensive family planning programme were to:

- avoid unwanted pregnancies;
- improve the physical health of families;
- reduce the perinatal mortality rate;
- alleviate maternal emotional stress.

In September 1975, a memorandum of guidance was issued to the Health and Social Services Boards which stressed that a choice of sources of family planning advice should be available in every locality, and people should be free to change their source and to attend clinics in another health board.¹

Current issues surrounding family planning services

Provision of family planning services

Family planning services can be accessed from a range of providers that includes community family planning clinics, hospitals, general practitioners, pharmacists and other organisations such as Brook. However, this factsheet focuses on the provision of family planning services by community family planning clinics and GPs.

Information on activity at community family planning clinics is collated centrally from the Korner return, KT31. Tables 2 to 8 present data on the provision of contraception in Northern Ireland's community family planning clinics only.

Family planning clinics

Research has shown that clients often choose to access different providers depending on their age and the service they require. Women under 20 and over 40 are more likely to go to a community clinic.² Latest statistics indicate that 59% of female first attenders are aged under 30 years, 18% are under 20, and just over 15% are over 40 years of age (see Table 4).

While many GP services are excellent, clinics generally provide a wider range of methods. Clinics also provide a service for women at different stages in their reproductive life cycle, which is often complementary to that provided in general practice. Many family planning clinics provide a number of services free of charge in addition to a wide range of contraceptive methods. Many of these are not available through GPs and include psycho-sexual counselling, on the spot pregnancy testing, and well woman services including advice on menstrual problems and the menopause.

Almost all family planning training of both doctors and nurses takes place in community family planning clinics.

General practice

Almost all GPs provide contraceptive services (see Table 1). While the majority of GPs throughout Northern Ireland are registered on the contraceptive list to provide family planning services, there is no requirement for them or practice nurses to have received specialist training.

In research undertaken by the Contraceptive Education Service (CES) in England, 88% of GPs had some formal training. Of these, two thirds held family planning qualifications issued in the 1970s and 12% had current Faculty of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care qualifications. A growing number of practice nurses are increasing their role in GP family planning services. The CES research also revealed that practice nurses were more likely to have attended recent formal training.³ Similar data is not available for Northern Ireland.

Family Planning will be unable to provide high quality family planning services.

Cost

An fpa/Contraceptive Alliance study carried out in 1995 showed that family planning is a highly cost effective public service. Every £1 spent on family planning generates about £11 in savings to public funding by preventing an estimated four million unplanned pregnancies each year.⁴ Further reductions in services or in choice of service provider or method, which have the effect of reducing the accessibility or availability of contraceptive advice and services, may reduce this cost effectiveness.

Table 1: Doctors providing contraceptive services as at 1 January 2004

	Doctors providing contraceptive services	Doctors providing contraceptive services to anyone
EHSSB	438	365
NHSSB	259	216
SHSSB	202	169
WHSSB	199	170
Total	1,098	920

Contraceptive provision

Tables 2 and 3 illustrate trends in the total number of attendances and total number of first contact attendances at community family planning clinics.

Table 2: Total number of attendances at family planning clinics in Northern Ireland for the period 1996-2003

Year	Total number of attendances
1996	87,875
1997	83,200
1998	80,086
1999	79,954
2000	72,126
2001	76,082
2002	75,302
2003	70,797

Source: Central Services Agency. These are the last figures available: figures are no longer kept.

fpa and other organisations (including the Royal College of Nursing, Faculty of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care, and National Association of Nurses for Contraception and Sexual Health) feel that GPs without an appropriate post-graduate qualification such as the Certificate of the Joint Committee of Contraception or the Diploma of the Faculty of

Table 3: Total number of first contact attendances at family planning clinics in Northern Ireland by Board area for the period 1996-2003

Year	EHSSB		NHSSB		SHSSB		WHSSB		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
1996	22,842	524	6,452	121	6,167	356	4,501	135	41,098
1997	24,439	576	5,375	150	5,580	262	5,340	119	41,841
1998	25,269	559	5,072	128	5,316	208	5,255	122	41,929
1999	24,944	579	4,825	123	5,144	321	5,651	78	41,665
2000	23,769	620	3,156	84	5,640	212	5,086	100	38,667
2001	22,714	619	2,283	79	4,676	135	4,679	120	35,305
2002	20,403	663	2,044	63	4,730	134	5,080	194	33,311
2003	23,318	667	1,750	64	4,206	99	4,866	246	35,216

Table 4: Summary of family planning services in Northern Ireland (year ending 31 March 2003)

Total number of contacts: 70,797

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts by age of client								
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	Total
Combined pill	254	2,393	3,530	1,968	999	457	184	65	9,850
Progestogen only	29	248	500	376	402	415	316	289	2,575
IUD	2	58	175	275	322	296	211	181	1,520
IUS	1	14	56	135	225	271	203	126	1,031
Cap, diaphragm	0	2	12	26	51	52	48	57	248
Injectable	35	515	781	501	329	272	126	53	2,612
Other spermicides	0	5	6	6	17	9	12	21	76
Sheath/condom	169	1,174	1,461	1,101	1,145	1,093	759	646	7,548
Condom female	1	6	13	5	6	12	6	5	54
Rhythm method	0	0	0	3	4	1	3	0	11
Female sterilisation	0	1	1	2	7	36	24	30	101
Male sterilisation	0	2	1	4	6	25	15	14	67
Implant	3	72	141	102	62	53	14	6	453
New method 1	36	131	122	91	78	60	55	38	611
New method 2	0	2	5	7	9	11	6	8	48
Other methods	41	339	641	480	416	361	238	318	2,834
No method used	103	581	861	635	581	506	397	838	4,502
TOTAL	674	5,543	8,306	5,717	4,659	3,930	2,617	2,695	34,141

First contacts - male

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts
Vasectomy	0
Sheath	965
Other method	77
No method provided	34
TOTAL	1,076

Emergency contraception

Type	Emergency contraception provision by age of client								
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	Total
Hormonal (COP)	17	93	92	43	25	21	8	5	304
Hormonal (POP)	182	1220	1446	608	323	218	114	41	4,797
IUD (inserted)	1	31	46	33	37	18	14	4	172
Other methods	0	3	7	11	9	4	3	1	38
TOTAL	200	1347	1591	695	394	261	139	51	5,311

Table 5: Summary of family planning services in the Northern Health and Social Services Board (year ending 31 March 2003)
First contacts - female

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts by age of client								
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	Total
Combined pill	45	197	123	76	53	23	4	3	524
Progestogen only	1	10	21	24	21	13	8	5	103
IUD	0	4	9	25	24	10	10	10	92
IUS	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	4
Cap, diaphragm	0	0	1	4	6	2	4	2	19
Injectable	4	21	23	25	13	13	7	1	107
Other spermicides	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Sheath/condom	18	69	67	61	66	39	16	15	351
Condom female	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Rhythm method	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female sterilisation	0	0	0	1	1	4	2	1	9
Male sterilisation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Implant	0	7	15	9	4	2	1	0	38
New method (1)	28	73	50	25	6	6	2	6	196
New method (2)	0	1	2	7	2	7	2	5	26
Other methods	1	12	14	10	6	7	3	4	57
No method used	5	37	30	24	20	23	18	64	221
TOTAL	102	431	357	292	226	149	77	116	1,750

First contacts - male

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts
Vasectomy	0
Male sheath/condom	62
Other method	0
No method used	2
TOTAL	64

Source: Northern Health and Social Services Board

Emergency contraception

Type	Emergency contraception provision by age of client								
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	Total
Hormonal (COP)	14	66	61	33	16	19	9	5	223
Hormonal (POP)	32	65	49	22	7	9	1	3	188
IUD (inserted)	0	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	10
Other methods	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	46	132	112	57	24	29	12	9	421

Table 6: Summary of family planning services in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board (year ending 31 March 2003)

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts by age of client								Total
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Combined pill	169	1,771	2,961	1,567	771	334	125	44	7,742
Progestogen only	20	169	401	254	309	321	237	198	1,909
IUD	0	46	142	181	218	204	159	129	1,079
IUS	0	7	24	67	128	173	127	87	613
Cap, diaphragm	0	0	10	17	31	34	27	35	154
Injectable	27	374	581	360	239	200	77	21	1,879
Other spermicides	0	0	1	0	5	8	5	10	29
Sheath/condom	104	808	1,091	667	648	654	394	353	4,719
Condom female	0	1	5	3	5	5	0	1	20
Rhythm method	0	0	0	3	3	1	2	0	9
Female sterilisation	0	1	1	1	6	29	19	23	80
Male sterilisation	0	2	1	4	6	25	15	14	67
Implant	1	36	86	67	41	40	12	6	289
New method (1)	0	0	4	10	8	3	4	1	30
New method (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other methods	37	312	575	409	309	266	171	244	2,323
No method used	63	362	599	353	281	249	147	323	2,377
TOTAL	421	3,889	6,482	3,963	3,008	2,546	1,521	1,489	23,319

First contacts – male

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts
Vasectomy	0
Male sheath/condom	568
Other method	76
No method used	23
TOTAL	667

Source: Eastern Health and Social Services Board

Emergency contraception

Type	Emergency contraception provision by age of client								Total
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Hormonal (COP)	3	15	31	8	9	2	1	0	69
Hormonal (POP)	122	970	1,264	511	267	176	93	33	3,436
IUD (inserted)	0	24	33	24	23	11	12	2	129
Other methods	0	3	7	11	9	3	3	1	37
TOTAL	125	1,012	1,335	554	308	192	109	36	3,671

Table 7: Summary of family planning services in the Southern Health and Social Services Board (year ending 31 March 2003)

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts by age of client								Total
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Combined pill	21	228	214	139	66	33	23	4	728
Progestogen only	0	24	22	37	22	24	21	26	176
IUD	2	3	7	23	27	35	18	15	130
IUS	0	6	19	36	54	54	33	20	222
Cap, diaphragm	0	0	1	3	4	8	8	6	30
Injectable	2	66	106	55	35	27	17	6	314
Other spermicides	0	5	5	5	6	0	3	3	27
Sheath/condom	15	131	155	194	207	188	149	116	1,155
Condom female	1	5	6	2	1	7	6	2	30
Rhythm method	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Female sterilisation	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	6	12
Male sterilisation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Implant	0	14	14	16	11	5	0	0	60
New method (1)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
New method (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other methods	1	14	35	38	54	58	33	47	280
No method used	23	96	127	145	120	129	137	263	1,040
TOTAL	65	592	711	693	608	571	452	514	4,206

First contacts – male

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts
Vasectomy	0
Male sheath/condom	91
Other method	1
No method used	7
TOTAL	99

Source: Southern Health and Social Services Board

Emergency contraception

Type	Emergency contraception provision by age of client								Total
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Hormonal (COP)	0	12	0	2	0	0	0	0	14
Hormonal (POP)	16	103	47	37	20	20	8	3	254
IUD (inserted)	1	2	3	3	11	0	0	0	20
Other methods	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	17	117	50	42	31	21	8	3	289

Table 8: Summary of family planning services in the Western Health and Social Services Board (year ending 31 March 2003)

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts by age of client								Total
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Combined pill	19	197	232	186	109	67	32	14	856
Progestogen only	8	45	56	61	50	57	50	60	387
IUD	0	5	17	46	53	47	24	27	219
IUS	1	1	13	31	40	44	43	19	192
Cap, diaphragm	0	2	0	2	10	8	9	14	45
Injectable	2	54	71	61	42	32	25	25	312
Other spermicides	0	0	0	1	5	1	4	8	19
Sheath/condom	32	166	148	179	224	212	200	162	1,323
Condom female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Rhythm method	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Female sterilisation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Male sterilisation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Implant	2	15	26	10	6	6	1	0	66
New method (1)	8	58	68	56	63	51	49	31	384
New method (2)	0	1	3	2	7	4	4	3	24
Other methods	2	1	17	21	47	30	31	23	172
No method used	12	86	105	113	160	105	95	188	864
TOTAL	86	631	756	769	817	664	567	576	4,866

First contacts – male

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts
Vasectomy	0
Male sheath/condom	244
Other method	0
No method used	2
TOTAL	246

Source: Western Health and Social Services Board

Emergency contraception

Type	Emergency contraception provision by age of client								TOTAL
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Hormonal (COP)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hormonal (POP)	12	82	86	38	29	13	12	2	274
IUD (inserted)	0	4	8	4	2	6	0	1	25
Other methods	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	12	86	94	42	31	19	12	3	299

References

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3. Walsh J. Reviewing contraceptive services: research findings and framework. London: Health Education Authority, 1999.
4. McGuire A, Hughes D. The economics of family planning services. Family Planning Association, 1995.

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