

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 infections (STIs).

There are ten 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 or go to **www.sexualhealthni.info/gum-clinics-northern-ireland**

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 infections (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.

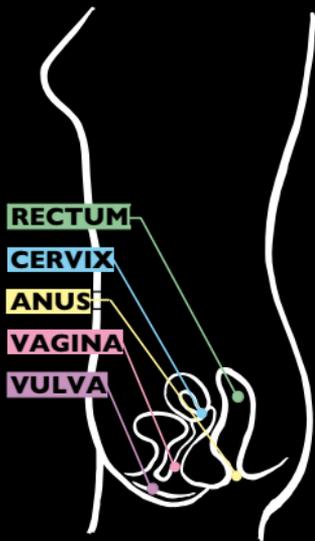


For women

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.

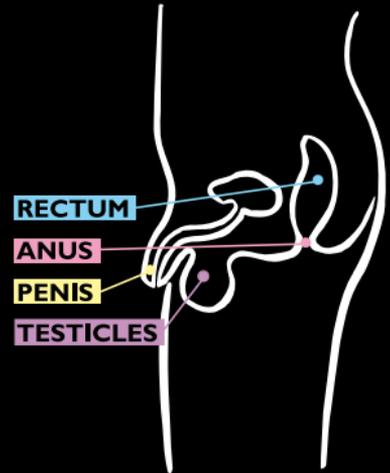


For men

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 in some cases you may need to make an appointment;
- confidential testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV;
- medical, nursing and social support for people with HIV infection;
- vaccinations for Hepatitis A and 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?

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 swabs to check for infection;
- ask you for a sample of urine;
- take a blood test (to check for Syphilis, HIV or Hepatitis B/C);

NB. Unless you tell the doctor otherwise, the blood sample taken from you will be tested for HIV.





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 infections 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 called the human papillomavirus (HPV) 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 treated if detected early.

Genital Herpes

Herpes is caused by a virus. There are two types of virus - the first causes sores around the mouth and nose (cold sores) and the second 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 or during birth, or by breastfeeding.

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 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, eg damage to the heart, brain and nervous system.

NB. All pregnant women in Northern Ireland are routinely offered a blood test antenatally for HIV and syphilis.





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.

Bacterial Vaginosis (Gardnerella)

Bacterial 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.

GUM Clinics in Northern Ireland

There are GUM clinics in the five Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) in Northern Ireland. If you are worried that you have an STI, you can get tested at your nearest clinic. You can find contact details of your nearest clinic below or at **www.sexualhealthni.info/gum-clinics-northern-ireland**

NB. For each GUM clinic opening times, you can also phone the numbers below.

Belfast

Genitourinary Medicine
Level 3 Outpatients Department
Royal Group Hospitals
Grosvenor Road
Belfast BT12 6BA
Tel: 028 9063 4050

Londonderry

Altnagelvin Hospital
Anderson House
Glenshane Road
Londonderry BT47 1SB
Tel: 028 7161 1269

Coleraine

Causeway Hospital
Outpatients 2 Department
4 Newbridge Road
Coleraine BT52 1HS
Tel: 028 7034 6028

Omagh

Sexual Health Clinic
Outpatients Department
Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex
7 Donaghie Road
Omagh BT79 0NR
Tel: 028 7161 1269

GUM Clinics in Northern Ireland continued

Ballymena

Ground Floor South
Braid Valley Buildin
Cushendall Road
Ballymena
Antrim BT43 6HL
Tel: 028 7034 6028

Bangor

Sexual Health clinic
Bangor Community
Hospital
Castle Street
Bangor BT20 4TA
Tel: 028 4483 8133

Downpatrick

Sexual Health Clinic
Outpatients Department
Downe Hospital
2 Struell Wells Road
Downpatrick BT30 6RL
Tel: 028 4483 8133

Lisburn

Sexual Health Clinic
Lisburn Health Centre
Linenhall Street
Lisburn BT28 1LU
Tel: 028 4483 8133

Portadown

Portadown Health and
Care Centre
Clinical Zone, Ground
Floor
Tavanagh Avenue
Portadown BT62 3BE
Tel: 028 3756 2080

Newry

Genitourinary Medicine
John Mitchell Place
Hill Street
Newry BT34 2BU
Tel: 028 3756 2080

For more information

Positive Life NI

20 Derryvolgie Avenue
Belfast BT9 6FN
Freephone 0800 137437
(Monday-Friday 9.00am-5.00pm)

Common Youth

23-31 Waring Street
Belfast BT1 2DX
Tel: 028 9032 8866

Common Youth

20b Abbey Street
Coleraine
BT52 1DU
Tel: 028 7034 2178

fpaNI

3rd Floor
Ascot House
24-31 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DB
Tel: 028 9031 6100

4th Floor
Northern Counties Building
22-24 Waterloo Place
Londonderry
BT48 6BU

Helpline: 0345 122 8687

fpaNI also have details of the GUM clinic opening times.



Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.

Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:

