

**Don't gamble**

**with your**

**SEXUAL**

**health**

• WHY A CHECK UP IS IMPORTANT •





## Introduction

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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 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.

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

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- ¥ 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.

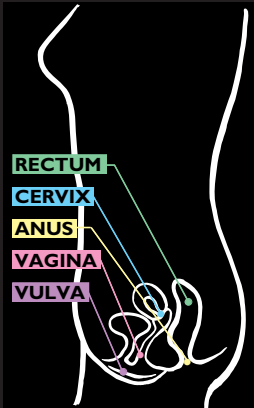


## For women

### 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.

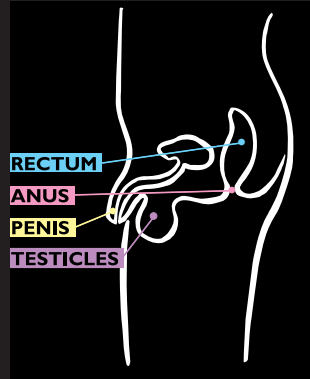


## For men

### What to look for:

- ¥ discharge or pus from the tip of the penis or anus;
- ¥ pain or a burning feeling when passing urine;
- ¥ itchininess, 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?

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- ¥ 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;
- ¥ 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 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

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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

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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

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### **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 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. All pregnant women in Northern Ireland are now routinely tested antenatally for HIV.

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.





### **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.

# Genito Urinary Medicine Clinics in Northern Ireland

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## **Royal Victoria Hospital**

Grosvenor Road,  
Belfast  
BT12 6BA.  
Direct Line 028 9063 4050  
Health Advisor 028 9032 8222

## **Altnagelvin Hospital**

Anderson House,  
Glenshane Road  
Londonderry  
BT47 1SB.  
Direct Line 028 7161 1269

## **Causeway Hospital**

Outpatients 2 Department  
4 Newbridge Road,  
Coleraine  
BT52 1HS.  
Direct Line 028 7034 6028 or 028 7034 6027

## **Daisy Hill Hospital**

5 Hospital Road,  
Newry  
BT35 8DR.  
Direct Line 028 3083 5050

NB. For GUM clinic opening times, please phone the telephone numbers above.

## For more information

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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 Care Trust area. Please note the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is the contact for publications in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area.

### **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust**

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 Care Trust**

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

### **Southern Health and Social Care Trust**

Southern Area Health Promotion Department  
St Luke's Hospital  
Loughgall Road  
Armagh BT61 7NQ.  
Tel: 028 3741 2424.

### **Western Health and Social Care Trust**

Health Promotion Department  
Maple Villa  
Gransha Park  
Londonderry BT47 6WJ  
Tel: 028 7186 5127.

**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.

**Brook Coleraine**

7 Lodge Road  
Coleraine BT52 1LU.  
Tel: 028 7034 2178.

**fpaNI**

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

3rd Floor,  
67 Carlisle Road,  
Londonderry BT48 6JL.  
Tel: 028 7126 0016.

Helpline: 0845 122 8687.

fpaNI also have details of the GUM clinic  
opening times.



Public Health Agency, Ormeau Avenue Unit, 18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.  
Tel: 028 9031 1611. Textphone/Text Relay: 18001 028 9031 1611.  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)