Your sexual health

Where to go for help and advice
What is this leaflet about?
This leaflet explains where you can get help and advice if:
- you need contraception
- you think you might have a sexually transmitted infection
- you’re planning to become pregnant
- you are pregnant and are not sure you want to have a baby
- you want to find out more about abortion
- you’re having problems with your sex life
- you have been sexually assaulted.
Who can help me with my sexual health?

- General practices.
- Specialist contraceptive clinics.
- Sexually transmitted infection testing clinics (genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics).
- Pharmacies.
- Specialist sexual assault centres.

Clinics that provide contraception and infection testing services are called sexual health clinics.

How can I find where my nearest service is?

- You can find out about all clinics from sexual health direct, run by fpa, on 0845 310 1334 or at www.fpa.org.uk.
- You can find details of all services including general practices and pharmacies at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk. In England and Wales you can call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47, in Scotland NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24 and in Northern Ireland you can call your local health board (details are in the phone directory or at www.healthandcareni.co.uk).
- You can also get details of your nearest contraception, GUM or sexual health clinic from a telephone directory, health centre, local pharmacy, hospital, midwife, health visitor or advice centre.
- You can get details of GUM or sexual health clinics from the Sexual Health Information Line on 0800 567 123 or at www.playingsafely.co.uk.
You can find details of young people’s services from Brook on 0800 0185 023 or from Sexwise on 0800 28 29 30, or at www.ruthinking.co.uk.

Who can use these services?

Anyone can use these services, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, religion, whether you are male, female, straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual. Some services hold sessions for men, women, young people, gay men and lesbians.

Are these services confidential?

Yes, all the services discussed in this leaflet are confidential. This means that your personal information, any information about your visit and the tests and treatments that you’ve had will not be shared with anyone outside that service without your permission. Even if you are under 16 you have the same right to confidentiality as anyone else. Don’t be afraid to ask if you are not sure who will see your information.

Health professionals may need to involve other services if they believe you, or another person, to be at significant risk of harm (such as physical or sexual abuse). They will discuss this with you.
What will happen when I go to one of these services?

This will depend on which service you use but may include the following:

- You will normally be asked to fill in a form with your name and address if it’s the first time you’ve used the service.
- At contraceptive services you may be asked questions about your medical and sexual history. If you choose certain methods of contraception you will need to have an internal examination, have your blood pressure taken or may be offered a test for sexually transmitted infections.
- If you are going for a check-up for sexually transmitted infections you will be asked questions about your sex life. You might feel embarrassed but being honest will help you get the right tests. See How will I be tested for STIs? on page 12.
- If you are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection support will be available to help you tell your sexual partner(s) to get a check-up too.
- Abortion services will ask you about your medical history and help you decide which method of abortion you will have. They may offer you a test for sexually transmitted infections. If necessary they will do a scan to see how pregnant you are, and a blood test.
- If you have been sexually assaulted you may be offered a more specialist service. They can also help you report the assault to the police, if you choose to.
It's fine to take a friend with you for support. If you need to have an examination you should be offered a chaperone. This means that someone else can be with you when you have the examination.

**What if I have special requirements?**

Everyone has a right to access health services. If you have special requirements (such as a disability or if English is not your first language) contact the general practice or clinic in advance to make sure it can meet your needs. In some circumstances you may be able to be seen at home.

**How can I make a complaint if I'm not happy with the service?**

If you are not happy with the NHS service you have received you have the right to make a complaint through the NHS complaints procedure (see www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk). You can also get information and help from The Patients' Association Helpline on 0845 608 4455 or from your local Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). See the phone directory, or ask at the service you attended.

**Contraception services**

This section explains the choices you have to help you find the contraception service that's most suitable for you.
Is contraception free and where can I go to get it?

You can obtain free contraception, including emergency contraception, from:
- a general practice, unless they say they don’t provide contraception services
- a contraception (family planning) clinic
- a young people’s service (these will have an age limit)
- some sexual health or GUM clinics.

You can also get emergency contraception from:
- NHS walk-in centres/minor injury units
- some hospital accident and emergency departments (phone first to check)
- some pharmacies (there may be an age limit).

Contraception is free even if your service gives you a prescription to take to the pharmacy.

Some pharmacists are able to provide a range of sexual health services including contraception. If you are 16 or over you can buy the emergency pill from most pharmacies for around £26. They also sell condoms, diaphragms, caps and spermicide.

You can also pay for some methods of contraception (including emergency contraception) at clinics run by organisations such as **bpas** (helpline 08457 304030; www.bpas.org.uk) and **Marie Stopes** (helpline 0845 300 8090; www.mariestopes.org.uk).