

Coronavirus ‘Sex-plained’

Your Questions Answered

At the time of writing this guidance is up to date but may change in line with government recommendations. To check up to date guidance, please visit <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>

Can I get Coronavirus from having sex?

Although Coronavirus is not a sexually transmitted infection, it is a respiratory bug which means close contact does increase the risk. We now know that Coronavirus has been found in the semen of men with active and past infection with COVID-19 but no evidence currently exists as to whether the virus can be passed sexually.

If your sexual partner is part of the same household, sex should not be a problem; however, this only applies if both you and your partner are not displaying any symptoms of Coronavirus or have not been in contact with Coronavirus. Symptoms include a high temperature and/or a dry persistent cough and/or anosmia (anosmia is the loss or a change in your normal sense of smell. It can also affect your sense of taste as the two are closely linked). If either of you show symptoms of the virus, you must adhere to social distancing advice and isolate yourself in a different room, where possible, with no contact.

Irrespective of symptoms if you or your sexual partner has a medical condition that may lead to a more severe illness with COVID-19, you should avoid sex.

If you are with your regular partner and you are sure that they are not infected, please use some form of contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy.

It is advised that you do not have sex with new people at this time. This also goes against Government advice to stay at home and to adhere to social distancing. Experts have warned that some people who have the virus may not show any symptoms and could easily spread it to others. You could pass it to them, or they could pass it to you via close contact and kissing.

Can I get Coronavirus from kissing?

Kissing passes on COVID-19. Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your household. If you have kissed or have been in contact with someone you think has gone on to develop Coronavirus, be sure to self-isolate. If you are somebody who has developed symptoms, and you know that you've kissed people recently, you should let them know.

Can I get Coronavirus by touching someone else's vagina or penis?

Zero contact between any partners that you're not living with is key. Essentially, any possibility of transfer of Coronavirus - from your mouth to your hands, to genitals, to someone else's nose or mouth - increases the risk of passing on Coronavirus.

This depends on your reasons for not using condoms previously. Using a condom consistently and correctly will help protect against sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancy. If you weren't using condoms because you were relying on something like the pull-out method - or you were taking chances with STIs - then it's even more important that you use condoms now. Remember, contact with anyone outside of your household is not allowed. You can now order free condoms by registering at: <https://setrust.hscni.net/healthy-living/youth-health-advice/>

Anything I should know about Coronavirus and masturbation?

Masturbation is the one fool proof thing you can do. The same hygiene rules apply: before and after, wash your hands along with any sex toys and your keyboard or touch screen if you used one.

How can I maintain a relationship at a time like this?

If you use your imagination a little bit there are lots of ways you can maintain a relationship without being face-to-face with your partner. For people who are dating and are isolating in different places, you may need some creativity. Zoom, Skype, FaceTime and Houseparty are all great apps used for audio and video calls one-to-one or with up to 100 people! They are great for staying in touch with partners or for staying in touch with family and friends, just be sure you follow the usual online safety rules.

Below are some ideas that you may find useful to continue relationships at this time.

1. Get creative and think of activities you can do in tandem while on video chat Netflix party
2. If you would normally plan a date around food or drink, why not do it virtually? Get a takeaway on speed dial or how about cooking up a special meal 'together'? Just be sure to sit at a table and talk when you're there. You know, like you would at a real restaurant!
3. Get to know your partner better on an emotional level during lockdown! Metro have done all of the thinking for you and put together 101 questions to ask [HERE](#).
4. Use video calling and do a workout together. Stretch out joints and muscles and get the blood pumping. Great for a boost of energy!
5. Remember, sexting is available to you but the rules still apply. Think before sending 'nudes' - once a photo is shared online, you have lost all control of it and it will be virtually impossible for you to undo. Even if you change your mind and delete the photo you uploaded, other people may have already shared or copied the image. Sending or sharing indecent images of anyone who is under 18 - or keeping an image someone sends you - is a serious crime. This is the case even if the person sharing the image with you is happy to do so or you are happy to send nude selfies to someone else.

If you feel that you need an appointment please contact the GUM Clinic Tel: **(028) 4483 8392** Reception will make you an appointment for a telephone consultation and provide you with the most appropriate information and support for your needs.

Help! I'm running out of contraceptive pills. How can I get some more?

If you usually get your contraceptive pills from the GP then contact your GP as normal. If you usually get your supply from the Sexual & Reproductive Health Care Service contact the clinic and a supply can be posted to you. If you wish to start the contraceptive pill you can also contact your GP or Sexual & Reproductive Health Care Service. Remember during this time it may take a little longer to get your pills, so to avoid running out, order your supply well in.

Help! I'm due to get my contraceptive injection. How can I get this?

At the present time, face-to-face contact is being minimised. If you usually get your contraceptive injection at the Sexual & Reproductive Health Care Service please contact the clinic and we can arrange to post out a supply of the contraceptive pill and/or condoms to act as short-term method until it is safe to have face to face appointments again.

Help! My coil or implant is about to expire. What should I do?

At present, to reduce risk of Coronavirus transmission, non-essential face-to-face contact with healthcare providers is being minimised where possible. Replacement procedures for long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) devices, such as coils and implants, which have recently expired, are deemed non-essential by the Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare.

Coils with Hormones

Mirena: Can be extended for another year and arrangements should be made for the removal/replacement after the COVID-19 crisis is over. The risk of pregnancy remains low during this extra year, however, full contraceptive cover is not guaranteed. Adding on a progesterone only contraceptive pill or condoms should be considered.

Jaydess/Kyleena: Arrangements should be made to have removal/replacement after the COVID-19 crisis is over. Whilst these coils have not been shown to cause any signs of infection or cause serious side effects after they have expired, there is not enough information to say pregnancy risk would remain low after 1 extra year of use. Therefore, the use of a progesterone only contraceptive pill or condoms is recommended after they have expired.

Coils without Hormones

5 Year & 10 Year Coils: Arrangements should be made to have removal/ replacement after the COVID-19 crisis is over. There remains little evidence to suggest these coils continue to work after they have expired. Therefore it is recommended to use a progesterone only pill or condoms as a short-term method until it is safe to resume face-to-face appointments when your coil can be replaced or removed.

Implants

The **Nexplanon** contraceptive implant can be extended for another year and arrangements should be made for the removal/replacement after the COVID-19 crisis is over. The risk of pregnancy remains low during this extra year, however, full contraceptive cover is not guaranteed. Adding on a progesterone only contraceptive pill or condoms should be considered.



Can I have a new coil/implant fitted?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and national guidance to protect our staff, patients and local communities, we are not currently carrying out routine/new coils and implant fittings.

We are issuing free contraceptive pills and free condoms by post as an alternative contraceptive choice.



My coil/implant hasn't expired but I am thinking of having it removed. Is this possible?

Attending any health related appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic increases the chances of the virus spreading. However, if you feel you are suffering any serious side effects of having a coil or implant in place, contact the Sexual & Reproductive Health Care Service. A Health Professional will assess your situation and if deemed urgent, arrangements can be made for you to be seen at a clinic.

If you are considering having your implant/coil removed to plan a pregnancy, arrangements can be made to have this done after the COVID-19 crisis is over. As COVID-19 is a new virus, information around it and pregnancy remains limited. There is little evidence to suggest being pregnant increases your risk of getting COVID-19, however, when you are pregnant it does increase your risk of picking up general infections. Being pregnant also increases your need to attend health related appointments, and during this time, this could increase your risk of getting COVID-19. There remains little evidence on the effects of babies born to mothers who have or have had COVID-19 during pregnancy.



I need emergency contraception and I'm not sure where I can get it?

Emergency contraception can still be accessed free from the Sexual & Reproductive Health Care Service and your GP. As always, the sooner you contact someone about needing emergency contraception, the more options you will have and the more likely it will be that you will not become pregnant as result of the risk. Therefore, contact the Sexual & Reproductive Health Care Service or your GP as soon as you feel you need emergency contraception. Emergency hormonal contraception can also be purchased at most local pharmacies. A list of

local pharmacies can be found on all internet search engines and it can be useful to phone the pharmacy first to ensure they are able to help. Some national pharmacies also sell emergency hormonal contraception on-line. If you decided to do this you should ensure you are purchasing your emergency hormonal contraception from a reputable company. You may also need to consider current delays with post due to COVID-19.



I need to discuss my pregnancy choices?

To facilitate this service Informing Choices NI is acting as a Central Access Point in order to provide a local pathway. The following link will provide this pathway:

<https://informingchoicesni.org/central-access-point>



South Eastern Health
and Social Care Trust

SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE SERVICE

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Sexual and Reproductive Health South Eastern HSC Trust

<https://setrust.hscni.net/service/sexual-and-reproductive-health/>

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

IT IS BEST TO USE EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER ANY RISK OF PREGNANCY.

You can buy an emergency contraception tablet from some chemists. If you do not intend to buy emergency contraception yourself, you need to attend a clinic in person for a consultation, so that your own individual contraceptive choices are offered based on your most accurate up to date personal and family medical history. You can also get emergency contraception from your GP.

? How soon do Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) symptoms appear?

Symptoms can develop within a few days or weeks, but sometimes they do not appear until months or even years later. Often there are few or no symptoms and you may not know you have an STI.

? Can certain STIs be asymptomatic?

In some cases, an STI may be asymptomatic (not show symptoms) because it's lying dormant in your body. Dormant STIs can cause someone to remain undiagnosed until symptoms begin to appear. This may put them at risk for long-term complications.

Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Hepatitis C, HIV, HSV (Herpes Simplex Virus), and syphilis can all have periods of remaining dormant.

The best way to ensure that dormant STIs receive the proper diagnosis and treatment is regular screening. BASHH recommends that all sexually active adults with new or multiple sexual partners receive at least yearly testing for most STIs, especially Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea.

It's also recommended that people who have sex without a condom or other barrier method receive STI testing more frequently.

If there is any chance you have an STI during the Covid 19 Crisis you can request a testing kit online at the following website: <https://sh24.org.uk/>

STI incubation period

When you first contract an STI, your body needs time to recognise and produce antibodies to the infection. During this time period, known as the incubation period, you may not experience any symptoms.

If you test for an STI too early and the incubation period is not over yet, you may test negative for the infection even if you do have it.

In addition, even after the incubation period has passed, there are some STIs that can take months or years to produce symptoms.

Since most STI tests use antibodies (not symptoms) as a marker of infection having symptoms is not necessarily a reliable marker of infection. That's why it's important to test for any STIs you think you may have encountered - even if you don't have symptoms.

? How soon can you be tested?

Every STI has its own incubation period. For some STIs, the body begins to produce antibodies and symptoms in as little as a few days. For others, it can take weeks or months for symptoms to appear. Here are the ranges of incubation periods for some of the most common STIs.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)	Incubation Periods	Advice
Chlamydia	7 - 21 days	Test on day 14
Genital Warts	21 - 90 days	
Genital Herpes	4 - 7 days	
Gonorrhoea	1 - 14 days	Test on day 14
Hepatitis B	8 - 22 weeks	
Hepatitis C	2 - 26 weeks	
HIV	4 weeks	WINDOW PERIOD IS 4 WEEKS
HPV	1 month - 10 years (depending on type)	
Syphilis	3 weeks - 20 years (depending on type)	
Trichomoniasis	5 - 28 days	
Pubic Lice	14 days	

Benefits of early detection and treatment

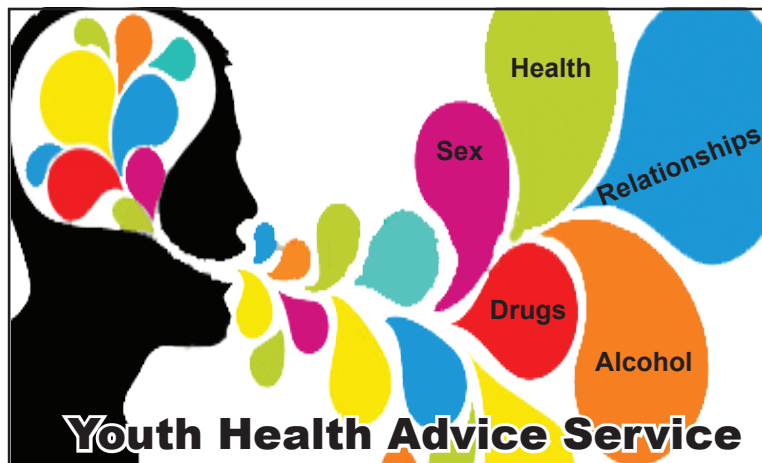
If you think you may have an STI it's important to stop engaging in sexual activity and seek treatment. Early detection and treatment of STIs plays an important role in stopping the transmission of STIs between yourself, your sexual partners and their sexual partners. In some cases, it can even save your life.


Some of the potential risks of untreated STIs include:


- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) and infertility in women, from untreated Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea
- Cervical Cancer in women, from untreated HPV
- Pregnancy and birth-related risks from untreated bacterial STIs, HIV, and Hepatitis B
- Organ damage, dementia, paralysis, or death, from untreated Syphilis.

Key takeaways:

- Early diagnosis and treatment of STIs is important for taking care of your sexual health
- Knowing the incubation period of the most common infections can help you determine when to seek medical help
- Having open and honest discussions about sexually transmitted infections can help to reduce the risk of long-term health complications.



 South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust



Monday - Friday
9.30am - 3.30pm
from 8 September 2020

We aim to respond
within 48 hours

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