

People urged to practise safer sex as gonorrhoea cases in England rise by 26%

A new report by Public Health England (PHE) shows the number of annual gonorrhoea diagnoses rose 26% between 2018 and 2019 (from 56,232 to 70,936). The data outlined in the [Sexually transmitted infections and screening for chlamydia in England 2019](#) report has prompted health officials to warn of the need to practise safe sex, including correct condom use.

This rise contributed to an overall increase of 5% in new sexually transmitted infection (STI) diagnoses in 2019 (from 447,522 in 2018 to 468,342).

Between 2018 and 2019, increases in gonorrhoea were reported in:

- gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) from 26,864 to 33,853 (26% increase)
- heterosexual women from 14,167 to 17,826 (26% increase)
- heterosexual men from 13,036 to 15,253 (17% increase)

The rise in diagnoses of gonorrhoea is explained in part by an increase in testing, using more accurate diagnostic tests and more comprehensive data on STI diagnoses.

Dr Hamish Mohammed, National Lead for Sexually Transmitted Infection Surveillance at Public Health England, said:

“The considerable rise of gonorrhoea cases in England, as well as the continued rise of other STIs, is concerning. It is important to emphasise that STIs can pose serious consequences to health – both your own and that of current and future sexual partners.

“We have seen that gonorrhoea has become more resistant to antibiotics and expect to see further cases of antibiotic-resistant gonorrhoea in the future, which will be challenging for healthcare professionals to manage.

“The consistent and correct use of condoms with new and casual sexual partners is the best defence against all STIs. If you have had sex without a condom with a new or casual partner, you should get tested.”

Cases of syphilis have increased by 10% from 2018 with 7,982 cases being reported in 2019.

With 229,411 cases diagnosed in 2019, chlamydia increased by 5% since 2018 and remains the most commonly diagnosed STI.

In 2019, more than 1.3 million chlamydia tests were carried out in England among young people aged 15 to 24 years as part of the National Chlamydia

Screening Programme (NCSP); the NCSP provides opportunistic screening to sexually active young people aged 15 to 24 years to increase the detection of chlamydia infections. Anyone under 25 who is sexually active is advised to get tested for chlamydia on change of sexual partner or annually.

Across all STIs, the highest rates of diagnoses continue to be seen in 15- to 24-year-olds, MSM and some minority ethnic groups. This is likely due, in part, to higher rates of partner change and/or more concurrent sexual partnerships without consistent condom use, and in some MSM there is evidence of increased transmission of STIs due to 'chemsex'.

The number of consultations at sexual health services (SHSs), in clinic settings and online, increased by 7% between 2018 and 2019 (from 3,613,447 to 3,852,121).

The rise in STIs is likely to be due to people not using condoms correctly and consistently with new and casual partners and an increase in testing, improving detection of the most common STIs.

Those at risk of STIs can still access services through sexual health clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many clinics offer online testing, which means people can order tests using clinic websites, take them in the privacy of their own home and send kits off to a laboratory for testing, and receive results via text, phone call or post.