

Press release: Campaign to protect young people from STIs by using condoms

Public Health England had launched 'Protect against STIs', a new campaign that aims to reduce the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among 16 to 24-year-olds through condom usage. The campaign is the first government sexual health campaign in 8 years.

To coincide with the launch of the campaign, a new YouGov survey of 2,007 young people reveals current attitudes towards condom use and what prevented them from using protection.

Shockingly, the findings revealed that almost half (47%) of sexually active young people said they have had sex with someone new for the first time without using a condom; whilst 1 in 10 sexually active young people said that they had never used a condom.

The new research also revealed that sexual health is a challenging topic for young adults to discuss, as 56% of men and 43% of women said that it is difficult to talk about STIs with friends. Furthermore, 58% said that if they had an STI they would find it difficult to talk to their sexual partner about it.

In 2016, there were over 141,000 chlamydia and gonorrhoea diagnoses in people aged between 15 and 24 in England and almost 6 in 10 (59%) of all those diagnosed with an STI were among this age group.

'Protect against STIs' aims to raise awareness of the serious consequences of STIs, which can cause infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID – an infection of the female upper genital tract, including the womb, fallopian tubes and ovaries), swollen or painful testicles and even meningitis. Gonorrhoea is a particular concern because it is becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics, and may become untreatable in the future. The campaign will be highlighting the increased likelihood of contracting an STI if having sex without a condom and that many STIs are symptomless, including 7 in 10 cases of chlamydia.

Despite the rates of STIs remaining consistently high among young people, currently, twice as many young people say that the main reason for using condoms is to avoid pregnancy (58%), rather than to avoid getting an STI (29%).

The campaign aims to help normalise and encourage condom use in young people, as it was revealed that 1 in 3 (32%) young adults said that they have never seen a condom mentioned in sex scenes on TV or in films.

'Protect Against STIs' launches on 15 December 2017 with a nationwide digital

advertising campaign targeting young people. The new advertising hears from real people talking about their own personal experiences of having an STI. The identities of the individuals will not be shown but will be animated by emojis. The campaign is being supported by a range of partners, including the Family Planning Association (FPA), Durex and British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH).

Gwenda Hughes, Head of STI Surveillance at Public Health England comments:

Rates of STIs among young people continue to be too high and it is concerning that many sexually active young people are not using condoms with new partners. Six in 10 chlamydia and gonorrhoea diagnoses are in those under 25 years of age, so we need to remind young people of the importance of using condoms with a new or casual partner to help prevent infection.

Dr Sara Kayat, TV doctor and campaign supporter comments:

Using a condom is the safest way to ensure that you avoid contracting STIs, such as chlamydia or gonorrhoea. Whilst many STIs are symptomless, contracting them can have serious health consequences if left untreated and even lead to infertility. As I tell patients in my clinic every week, it's just not worth putting yourself at risk by not using a condom.

Tom Haywood, Senior Brand Manager at Durex UK, said:

STI rates remain high amongst young people in England and we want young people to know that sex can be fun and safe, if you wear a condom. There is still a perception for many that condoms reduce pleasure and fun, but condoms should be a key part of positive sexual activity as they help protect against STIs. Through this campaign, Durex wants to help educate young people around condom use and help reduce levels of STIs.

Visit [the campaign website](#) for more information.

Additional quotes

Dr Elizabeth Carlin, President of the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) comments:

BASHH are delighted to support this important new campaign from Public Health England. It is both timely and crucial given the high rates of sexual infections in young people, many of whom do not have symptoms. Condoms remain essential in the fight against STIs,

as well as HIV, and we recommend using them for sex with any new or casual partners. We urge anyone who is concerned about their sexual health, or risks they have taken, to have a check-up and be tested – it is quick and easy to do.

Jesse, aged 24 from London who contracted chlamydia and gonorrhoea in the past comments:

I've had both chlamydia and gonorrhoea in the past when I didn't use a condom and it wasn't a nice experience. They caused pain in my groin and discomfort when urinating. The worst of it though was having to tell my previous and current sexual partner that I had contracted the STIs, so they also needed to get checked and treated. I had symptoms, but I know there are so many people who don't, so now when having sex with someone new I will definitely use a condom.

1. [Campaign advertising and images](#) can be downloaded online.
2. Dr Sara Kayat is a GP at Grays Inn Road Medical Practice. Her main areas of expertise are sexual and reproductive health, as well surgical specialties like ENT and orthopaedics. Interviews available upon request.
3. Public Health England [Public Health England](#) exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. Twitter: [@PHE_uk](#), Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland.
4. The Family Planning Association (FPA) is supporting the 'Protect against STIs' campaign by helping to deliver sexual health information and support to key audiences via their Sexwise website.