

# Sexual health check-ups

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In recent years there has been a big increase in the number of sexually transmitted infections in the UK, most notably the bacterial infections syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia and LGV. Many of the people diagnosed with these infections have been HIV-positive gay men.

## Why check-ups are important

If you are sexually active there's a chance that you can pick up a sexually transmitted infection.

Some of these infections can mean that you have an increased risk of passing HIV on to somebody else during unprotected anal, oral or vaginal sex.

Sexually transmitted infections don't always cause symptoms, so a check-up and tests are often needed to tell if you have an infection.

Sexual health check-ups provide an opportunity to test you for, and vaccinate you against, the liver viruses hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

Hepatitis C seems to be more easily passed on sexually to and by people with HIV, and you can also be tested to see if you have been infected with this virus.

Condoms and lubricants are available free of charge from sexual health clinics.

## Where to go

Most HIV clinics have a sexual health clinic attached. What's more an increasing number of the large HIV clinics are starting to offer sexual health screens to their patients as part of their routine HIV care.

You can search for clinics using our online tool, the e-atlas: [www.aidsmap.com/e-atlas](http://www.aidsmap.com/e-atlas).

## What to expect

All tests and treatment offered by NHS sexual health clinics are free of charge. You can choose which sexual health clinic you go to – you do not have to go to the one in your local area or the one associated with your HIV clinic. You don't need to be referred by your GP or your HIV doctor.

Some sexual health clinics operate on a walk-in basis. If you go to a walk-in clinic be prepared for a long wait. If your chosen clinic operates an appointment system, then you may have to wait a few days for the next available appointment. If you have symptoms make sure that you say so when making your appointment, as there may well be a number of emergency appointments available allowing you to be seen sooner.

When you go to the clinic, you will be asked to register. Your details will remain confidential.

First of all you will usually be seen by a doctor or nurse, who will ask you about the kind of sex you have been having, ask you if you have any symptoms and then examine you. Try to answer these questions as fully and truthfully as possible – this will ensure that you have the right tests. If you don't want to tell the doctor or nurse about your sexual history, you could just ask for a full sexual health screen. Also it makes good sense to mention if you are taking any medication, including HIV treatment, or are allergic to any medicines.

You will then be seen by a nurse for the tests the doctor thinks you need to have. Men can expect to have at least one swab taken from the tip of the penis, and women at least one swab from the vagina. It's important not to pass urine for at least two hours before you go to the clinic. If you do, your swabs might not show if you have an infection. If you have had anal and/or oral sex, swabs will be taken from the anus and/or throat. It's likely that blood samples will be taken to check for syphilis and, if you are a gay man or injecting drug user, for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

If you have sores on your genitals these may also be swabbed to check to see if you have herpes.

You will be asked to provide a urine sample.

Some of the test results will be available immediately, but you will be asked to call back a week or so later to get some other results.

If you do have an infection, you will be given treatment. You will be asked to return after you have finished taking your treatment to make sure it has worked.

If you have an infection you will be given an opportunity to see a health adviser, who can give you information about safer sex and how to protect your own and other people's sexual health. They will also ask you to help them, where possible or practicable, to contact your sexual partners so they can be tested and treated too. Where appropriate, health advisers can provide referrals to other services.

If you have genital warts you will be asked to come in regularly for treatment which will be provided by a nurse.

Free condoms and lubricants are available from sexual health clinics.