

SUMMARY OF INTELLIGENCE ON SEXUAL HEALTH

KEY FACTS

- Research suggests that sexual risk-taking behaviour is increasing across the population.
- HIV prevalence in adults increased by 20% to 49,500 in 2002. An estimated 31% of people with HIV in the UK remain undiagnosed. New HIV diagnoses among heterosexuals continue to rise (by 27% between 2002 and 2003). New HIV diagnoses in gay men are also increasing.
- Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) and affects an estimated one in ten sexually active young women. Infections reported in sexual health clinics increased by 9% to over 89,000 in 2003. If left untreated it can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease, ectopic pregnancy and infertility.
- Other STIs are also increasing. In 2003, cases of genital warts increased by 2% to 70,883 and syphilis increased by 28% to 1,575.
- Delays in access to diagnoses and treatment lead to more people being infected with STIs.
- Nearly a quarter of all pregnancies in England and Wales end in abortion. Three in ten of these women have already had one or more previous abortions.

Inequalities exist

- Women, young people, gay men, black and ethnic minority groups and people living in London are disproportionately affected by poor sexual health.

WE ARE NOW GOING TO...

Health in the consumer society

- Develop a new national campaign targeted particularly at younger men and women to ensure that they understand the real risk of unprotected sex and persuade them of the benefits of using condoms to avoid the risk of STIs or unplanned pregnancies.

Children and young people - starting on the right path

- Fund a three-year *Young People's Development Programme* to pilot ways of reducing teenage pregnancy and improving sexual health (and reducing substance misuse), particularly among vulnerable young people.
- We are working with PCTs to pilot a new resource aimed at delivering health information for younger men aged 16–30. *FIT* magazine will be based on the *Your Life* model, bringing together national and local content to reflect local priorities including sexual health.
- Ensure a broader reach of information about sexual health for young people in ways that they can access in complete confidence. This will include:
 - confidential signposting to advice plus easier access to 'teenage test your sexual health knowledge' material to ensure all teenagers have access to the information they need at the time they need it.
 - a confidential email service offered by trained sexual health advisers
 - provision of information via www.ruthinking.co.uk partnerships with specialist websites such as www.teenagehealthfreak.org and online youth portals

- increased support for parents in talking to children about sex and relationships
- provision of advice in settings where young people go
- development of interactive learning material
- provision of targeted material for specific groups such as disabled children, young people in public care and care leavers.

A health-promoting NHS

- Commit new capital and revenue funding to modernise the whole range of sexual health services, to communicate better with people about risks, and offer faster and better prevention and treatment, and deliver these services in a different way.
- Accelerate the introduction of a national screening programme for chlamydia, to cover the whole of England by March 2007.
- Provide efficient and convenient screening services through a national programme and take steps to introduce and evaluate the effectiveness of chlamydia screening in retail pharmacies in urban and rural areas starting in London.
- We will therefore start a one-year contraceptive review in early 2005 and invest centrally to meet gaps in local services in particular to ensure that the full range of contraceptive services is available, good practice is spread and services modernised.
- Set a goal that, by 2008, everyone referred to a GUM clinic should be able to have an appointment within 48 hours.

Health Development Agency evidence briefings summarise evidence on the effectiveness of approaches to promote health, and include *Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections* (2004) (www.hda.nhs.uk/documents/sti_eb_summary.pdf) and *HIV Prevention* (2003) (www.hda-online.org.uk/documents/HIV_review_summary.pdf)

WHAT THE CONSULTATION RAISED

The major themes from consultation responses on sexual health were better information for the public and work in schools. Other issues raised included sexual health clinic funding and waiting times, chlamydia screening, free contraception, 'one-stop shops' and confidentiality.

WHAT WE ARE DOING ALREADY

- The National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV was published in 2001, followed by an implementation plan in June 2002. The strategy complements the Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.
- Investment to date includes:
 - £26 million to modernise sexual health services and reduce waiting times;
 - £17.5 million to tackle chlamydia;
 - £4 million 'Sex Lottery' campaign;
 - over £5 million to improve abortion services; and
 - £1 million to boost contraception services.
- PCTs are responsible for commissioning local sexual health services; the Department of Health publishes guidance to support them.

Campaigns

- We are investing in national campaigns to raise awareness, prevent the spread of STIs and reduce unintended pregnancies. Over £10 million was invested in 2003–04, including the 'Sex Lottery' campaign, sexual health helplines, targeted HIV prevention and the teenage pregnancy campaign.
- The 'Sex Lottery' information campaign was targeted specifically at sexually active 18–30 year olds, and one in four are likely to change their behaviour as a result of the campaign.

HIV

- Recommended standards for HIV treatment were published in October 2003. We will publish recommended standards for other areas of sexual and reproductive health. An HIV test will be offered to all sexual health attendees on their first screening for STIs.
- An extended HIV testing and awareness campaign for African communities was launched in spring 2004 and builds on work with the Terrence Higgins Trust to promote sexual health to gay men.

Monitoring

- The Health Protection Agency provides high quality surveillance data on sexually transmitted infections and HIV to help target resources and track progress.

WE WILL HAVE DELIVERED IF...

...we stop the rise in STI rates over the next two years and then see a fall, and we reduce the 'under-18 conception rate by 50% by 2010 as part of a broader strategy to improve sexual health' (2004 Government PSA target).