

Improving Young People's Sexual Health Scrutiny briefing report – November 08

Sexual health is a significant public health priority in the United Kingdom. The consequences of poor sexual health can be serious, unintended pregnancies and STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections) can have a long lasting impact on people's lives. Similar to other inequalities, sexual health affects certain communities more than others,

“Poor sexual health is linked with disadvantaged communities and health inequalities. The highest rates of STIs and unintended pregnancies are linked to deprived areas and notably to inner city Leeds”

(Public Health Annual Report, 2005/06)

Key Objectives for Sexual Health

1. To prevent new sexually transmitted infections and unintended conceptions
2. To ensure early diagnosis and effective treatment and care
3. To reduce the stigma associated with sexual ill health

As sexual health and teenage pregnancy are often a consequence of inequalities and has strong links to risk taking behaviours, sexual health cannot be addressed in isolation. Clear cross-cutting links need to be made with several other strategies and work areas.

Statistics on incidence clearly show that STIs disproportionately affect communities already suffering from considerable inequalities relating to their sexual orientation, ethnicity and gender. Sexual ill health is not equally distributed among the population, with the highest burden being borne by women, gay men, teenagers, young adults and black African and African Caribbean groups. There is also a strong link between social deprivation and STIs, alongside sexual behaviour as a major factor determining the incidence of STIs. The second National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, or “NATSAL 2000” (5), shows that there have been notable changes in sexual behaviour since the first survey in 1990.

These include:

- a greater number of lifetime partners;
- lower median age at first intercourse;
- a greater proportion of the sample with concurrent partnerships;
- greater proportion with two or more partners in the past year who did not use condoms consistently.

While the incidence and prevalence of HIV, gonorrhoea and syphilis affects age groups over 25 years of age, the more common STIs such as Chlamydia and genital warts are much more concentrated in under 25's. 1 in 10 young people in Leeds are testing positive for Chlamydia.

Current Service provision

Leeds has a number of providers offering services for young people

Pharmacy Enhanced Service is commissioned from 27 Pharmacy sites based in areas with high termination and teenage pregnancy rates. These sites offer free

emergency hormonal contraception (EHC), pregnancy testing and Chlamydia testing to under 25's.

Community Pregnancy Testing Scheme provides early access for under 25's to pregnancy testing through youth settings. Twenty agencies provide this service.

C-card provides access to free condoms for under 25's from 140 sites across Leeds. Each young person has a 1-2-1 discussion with a worker covering correct condoms use, service access and healthy sexual relationships. Over 20,000 young people in Leeds have registered for c-card between 2002 – 2006.

HYP's are school based health drop in services, which include sexual health. Six schools in Leeds provide this service supported by School Nursing and Education Leeds.

Young People Friendly Practice provides a drop in service for young people in GP practice's in 21 sites across Leeds. Young people can access pregnancy testing, Chlamydia testing, condoms and support around contraception.

Chlamydia testing for under 25's is offered by 120 sites across Leeds. As part of the national Chlamydia screening programme, a range of service providers offer free and easy access to testing. All tests are also screened for gonorrhoea.

The Voluntary Sector is a key partner in reaching those most vulnerable to poor sexual health for prevention activity

City-wise – Under 25's Contraception and Sexual Health Clinic