

## Sexual Health and Contraception Update: 20/11/2020

As the COVID19 pandemic continues and restrictions have been reintroduced, it is important for us to still provide timely and consistent access to testing, treatment and contraception to prevent sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies, particularly for those with limited or restricted access to health care services.

Public Health are continuing to work with a range of stakeholders to ensure we have robust business continuity plans for all aspects of sexual health services during COVID19. We have reviewed all elements of the sexual health services which might be negatively impacted (particularly focusing on vulnerable groups) and have explored ways to deliver solutions. Some of these will be temporary measures during COVID19.

An interactive map of local sexual health and contraception services can be found on [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/sexualhealth](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/sexualhealth)

The information in this update provides a brief overview of what is currently available. All services are subject to change.

### Headlines:

- All 3 specialist sexual health centres are open. Providing booked appointments, with walk-in services for Under 18's. Visit [Sexual Health Hertfordshire](#)
- Emergency Contraception is available on-line for all ages
- Dual testing for both chlamydia and gonorrhoea is now available to Public Health commissioned services that currently deliver the chlamydia screening programme e.g. pharmacies, GP's, youth services. Anyone 15 years and above (previously up to 25 years) can now request a test
- Those needing the contraceptive pill, live in Hertfordshire and 16 years or above, can order on-line through the [SH:24](#) contraceptive service.
- For existing Combined Hormonal Contraceptive users it is reasonable at this time to allow further remote prescription to cover the next 6-12 months without rechecking BMI/blood pressure. See [FSRH](#)
- GP can refer patients to LARC Referral Points via DSX
- Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) now available from Sexual Health Hertfordshire
- HIV Training available from [THT](#)

## Sexual Health Hertfordshire (SHH)

Sexual Health Hertfordshire (SHH) have restarted services, prioritising high risk individuals and those with complex sexual health conditions. Phone/video consultations are being used and patients are signposted to online provision e.g. STI testing when appropriate.

Walk-in clinics are not available, however a specific service for young people (18 years and under) is available every Tuesday from 4pm to 6.30pm at Stevenage and Hatfield, and every Wednesday from 4pm to 6.30pm at Watford. Clinic U is specifically focused on the sexual health and wellbeing of our LGBT+ community has also reopened. These run on alternate Thursdays from the Stevenage and Watford centres.

Due to Covid precautions and to allow for social distancing patients will need to be seen their own and may be given an appointment slot and asked to come back later in the same session.

All patients wanting to be seen about a problem related to their sexual health, can phone 0300 008 5522 between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm Monday to Friday. For more information [visit SHH](#)

Individuals contacting the service will be triaged over the phone and if appropriate given the opportunity to make an appointment or speak to a doctor or nurse on the phone who will discuss the options available.

Please note SHH are not commissioned to fit contraception for non-contraception purposes e.g. HRT, Menorrhagia. If a health professional would like to contact the service they can do so via the [SHH professionals page](#) using the relevant contact forms.

- **New Satellite Services**

The Council has invested in two additional satellite services to support those at higher risk of poor sexual health and unable to access one of the specialist sexual health centres in Stevenage, Hatfield or Watford.

**West:** Elstree Way Clinic. Tuesday 12pm – 8pm. Due to start early January.

**East:** Cheshunt – Times and location to be confirmed. Due to start Jan/Feb.

## Emergency Contraception

The emergency contraceptive pill is available from a GP, Sexual Health Hertfordshire and community Pharmacists.

Some pharmacies continue to offer the emergency contraception pill free to under 25s. To find services [click here](#). It is also available for over 25s to buy. Free on-line emergency contraception is also available (**see below – online contraceptive services**).

Due to increased demand on services, individuals should be advised to contact the service before attending in order to check availability and avoid unnecessary travel.

### Remote consultation

If available, remote consultation via telephone / video can be offered with individuals brought in for face-face consultation only if urgent and essential. Safeguarding measures must be in place during all consultations.

Guidance and examples on undertaking remote consultations can be found here:

[A quick guide for NHS workers](#)

[Royal College of Nursing: Remote Consultation Guidance under COVID-19 restrictions](#)

[Principles of safe video consulting in general practice during COVID-19](#) (Version 2: Updated 20 August 2020)

[Remote consultations: how pharmacy teams can practise them successfully](#)

## STI testing

### On-line Testing

No routine STI testing is taking place within Sexual Health Hertfordshire (SHH) for patients with no symptoms, therefore SHH have increased [on-line testing](#) to 100 per day. This will continue until April 2021. If a patient has symptoms they must contact SHH to receive further advice and appropriate treatment.

Both HIV and Syphilis tests are also available from the national HIV Homes Sampling Service: [Free Testing HIV](#)

## Dual Testing – Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea

Due to a rise in diagnosed Gonorrhoea cases across England, including Hertfordshire, a review of local STI epidemiology data was undertaken. In response, the following changes to the current Chlamydia Screening Programme came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020:

- Dual testing for both chlamydia and gonorrhoea is now available to Public Health commissioned services that currently deliver the chlamydia screening programme e.g. pharmacies, GP's, youth services
- Anyone 15 years and above (previously up to 25 years) can now request a test

This change will provide easier access to STI testing and treatment services, especially in areas where access to specialist and online sexual health services is difficult.

A contract variation has been sent to Primary care services eligible to provide dual testing. This 6-minute presentation for Primary Care provides a summary of the changes and further updates:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=396vAv9QFq8>

## Contraception

Some patients may not be able to access their preferred method of contraception at this time, but other bridging methods should continue to be readily available e.g. progestogen-only pill. Information for patients on the range of contraception options should be made available [here](#).

A printable contraception fact sheet is also available.



FY\_INFOSHEET\_PRI  
NT.pdf

Patients with any concerns or medical issues relating to their contraception are advised to contact their GP or Sexual Health Hertfordshire in the first instance.

### Combined hormonal contraception and rechecking BMI/blood pressure

Public Health Hertfordshire have recently undertaken a public survey on the contraception needs and experiences of women living in Hertfordshire. With over 2000 responses, these findings will be used for a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Contraception – due to be released in December 2020.

Early findings have identified that some women are unable to access combined hormonal contraception (CHC) from their GP or via on-line services, due to difficulties getting an appointment for a BMI/blood pressure check.

For women already established on combined hormonal contraception, the FSRH's clinical advice during the Covid-19 outbreak is as follows:

*“It is reasonable at this time to allow further remote prescription to cover the next 6-12 months without rechecking BMI/blood pressure; as the risk associated with unplanned pregnancy is likely to be greater than the risk relating to continued use.*

*If the provider documented all relevant medical history at the time of last CHC provision, and no contra-indications were identified, provision of a further supply of combined hormonal contraception without review of medical history can be considered”.*

Further guidance can be found [here](#).

## Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC)

Currently, 107 General Practices have a contract with the Council to provide both Intra-Uterine Contraceptive Device (IUCD) and Sub-Dermal contraceptive Implants (SDI). The availability and level of LARC services within Primary Care will vary.

Practices commissioned by the Council to provide LARC should continue to prioritise essential contraception services as per FSRH guidance on [essential SRH services during Covid-19 \(Nov 2020\)](#). However, if a practice can reintroduce other LARC provision this should only be undertaken if safe to do so.

Below is guidance on restarting LARC Fittings in Primary Care:

- The Primary Care Women's Health Forum has produced a '[Protocol for LARC fittings in primary care during COVID-19 restriction easing – June 2020](#)' to enable clinicians to safely restart LARC fitting services.
- Guidance from the [Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health](#) (FSRH) provides recommendations on which services should be prioritised during the second wave. It also outlines what has worked well during strict lockdown and should remain in place beyond the pandemic.
- For patients who require routine LARC replacement or removal please refer to [Extended use](#) guidelines.
- Replacement procedures for long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) devices that have recently expired are non-essential. Further recommendation on extended use of the etonogestrel implant and 52mg levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine system during COVID restrictions can be found here: [Extended Use](#).

## LARC Referral Points

The Council, in conjunction with GPs across Hertfordshire have implemented a referral pilot project for LARC fitting/removal appointments - IUCD) and SDI. This will run until March 2021. For more information contact: [Felicity.Antwi-Adjei@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Felicity.Antwi-Adjei@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

Where a practice does not have the ability to offer IUCD or SDI procedures, they may with the consent of the patient refer to the participating practices listed below.

**WEST:** These practices will accept referrals from any practice in the Herts Valley CCG area:

- Kings Langley Surgery
- Vine House Health Centre
- Sheepcot Medical Centre
- Bridgewater Surgeries

Practices involved in the pilot can take referrals for both IUCD or SDI fittings and removals.

Referral pathways for services in the West can be found here:



LARC Referral Pilot  
Project Pathway.pdf

**EAST:** Each Practice has their own referral mechanism. Please contact them first to confirm the best way to refer a patient:

- Baldock Surgery - *Take referrals from Sollershot or Garden City Surgery and Ashwell Surgery*
- Church Street Partnership - *Taking referrals from South Street, Central Surgery, Much Hadham, Parsonage*
- Hall Grove Group Practice - *Taking referrals from any practice within WGC or Hatfield*

- Lea Valley Health GP Federation - *Taking referrals from The Limes, Abbey Road, Cromwell and Wormley, Cuffley Village, High Street, The Maples, Stockwell Lodge, Stanhope, Warden Lodge.*
- Knebworth and Marymead Surgery - *Taking referrals from anywhere within Hertfordshire*

Patients requiring LARC for non-contraceptive purposes should be referred to the Community Gynaecology Service.

**Additional LARC Clinic:** The Council has commissioned MSI to provide an additional LARC clinic in Hemel Hempstead. Patients do not need a GP referral and can self-refer by calling **01454 808100**, Monday to Friday 8a.m. – 4p.m. to book in for treatment. This service is commissioned only for contraception fitting reasons only. The clinic opened in July 2020 and has completed 106 procedures.

## Online Contraceptive services

In response to the changing situation surrounding the outbreak of Covid-19, Hertfordshire County Council, the CCG's and Sexual Health Hertfordshire have temporarily made some contraceptive services available online. These are provided by SH:24.

Offering alternative services online follows [BASHH recommendations](#) , releasing capacity within primary care and sexual health services, minimises face-to-face contact and supports women to have continued access to contraception.

These services are in addition to those already available through Primary Care and Sexual Health Hertfordshire.

**Online Contraceptive Pill:** If someone requires the contraceptive pill, live in Hertfordshire and 16 years or above, they can order on-line through the [SH:24](#) contraceptive service. Since its launch in April, the service has received positive feedback with just over 2321 prescriptions dispensed up to 30th September 2020.

Users wishing to order the progestogen-only pill (POP) or combined oral contraceptive pill (COC) need to complete information regarding their medical history. and women wishing to order COC are asked to provide a recent blood pressure, height and weight.

Following completion of the online proforma an SH:24 clinician will review the request and clinical history. If any potential contraindications are identified the user will be contacted (via text message and/ or phone call) for further information and for a discussion regarding suitable contraceptive options.

The user will then be given either 3, 6- or 12-months' supply, which is then posted to their chosen address.

**Online Emergency Contraception:** If someone requires free and confidential emergency contraception, they must live in Hertfordshire, be over 16 and less than 50 years of age, they can either order on-line from [SH:24](#) or access services listed above.

Under 16's or those unable to access on-line services should still seek support by contacting their GP, local Pharmacist or [Sexual Health Hertfordshire](#) for further information.

Emergency contraception orders are reviewed by an appropriate clinician i.e. a registered nurse or doctor with training in sexual and reproductive health. If any contraindications are flagged, if necessary, the clinician will contact the service user to collect additional and clinically relevant information. This contact is initiated through the initial order form (e.g. specifying concurrent medication), text message and/ or phone call to discuss the contraindication in more depth.

Once the clinician is satisfied that the order form is complete an online prescription is generated and delivered by 1st class Royal Mail post. The person does not have to sign for it.

## HIV

COVID-19 infection is likely to be worse in those with a 'weakened immune system'. This does not mean that all people with HIV are considered at increased risk. Those on HIV treatment with a good CD4 count and an undetectable viral load are not considered to have weakened immune systems. A 'good' CD4 count means anything over 200. If an individual CD4 count is less than 200, not on treatment or if they have a detectable viral load, then it's particularly important that they follow the guidance to reduce the risk of catching the virus.

[THT Hertfordshire](#) continue to offer support for people newly diagnosed with HIV and those living with HIV in Hertfordshire. THT offer free online HIV training for professionals on their [Eventbrite page](#). Here you will also find support events for those living with HIV e.g. those 50+ and information on PrEP and other sexual health issues.

**Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)** - PrEP is a drug taken by HIV-negative people before and after sex that reduces the risk of getting HIV. It forms part of a package of care, with a combination HIV prevention and risk reduction, alongside health promotion, condom use, regular STI testing and swift initiation of HIV/STI treatment where indicated. PrEP is now available free-of-charge at sexual health clinics such as Sexual Health Hertfordshire and all Level 3 NHS GUM services across England. Any one interested in accessing PrEP should make contact with [Sexual Health Hertfordshire](#) or [THT Hertfordshire](#) in the first instance.

### HIV Test 'Alert System'

In 2017-19, 46.2% of people diagnosed with HIV in Hertfordshire were diagnosed at a late stage, compared to an England average of 43.1%. People often present to primary care with signs and symptoms of HIV several times before being diagnosed, indicating missed opportunities for diagnosis. In order to prompt clinicians, when the patient record is retrieved, the Council in partnership with HVCCG have developed a high priority alert that will appear indicating that the patient may need to be referred for HIV testing. This is due to be launched early December 2020.

## Young People Services

[YCH Access Points](#) have reopened for young people to access free condoms, dual testing, pregnancy testing and relationship and sexual health advice. Young people are advised to call, text or email to make an appointment with a personal adviser before visiting. Young people can still ask questions on sex and relationships via the Sexual Health texting service on 07860 057 369. They can also visit [YCH](#) to receive guidance and support on a range of issues, including health and wellbeing.

The Public Health Nursing Team also provide a confidential 'chat health' texting service: 0748 063 5050, where a young person can ask for help or advice on a range of issues such: Weight and exercise, stress or anxiety, relationships and sexual health. The service runs from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday including the school holidays. After 5pm and on weekends, the service is covered by a bounce back message explaining where to get support or help. For more information visit: [School Nursing](#)

## Termination of Pregnancy

At this point of writing (20/11/2020), [MSI](#) and [BPAS](#) who provide Termination of Pregnancy services in Hertfordshire have not reduced capacity. They have introduced telemedicine for early medical abortion (EMA), which will ensure individuals that meet the criteria set out below, do not need to leave their homes to access treatment.

**Early Medical Abortions:** The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has approved 2 temporary measures in England to limit the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) and ensure continued access to early medical abortion (EMA) services:

- patients will be able to take both pills for early medical abortion up to 10 weeks in their own homes, without the need to first attend a hospital or clinic
- registered medical practitioners (doctors) will be able to prescribe both pills for the treatment of early medical abortion up to 10 weeks from their own homes

This must be carried out in line with the criteria set out [here](#).

BPAS have also produced a [short film](#) for patients about the abortion pill treatment and service available.

A compilation of COVID-19 guidelines and resources for the HIV and sexual health sector is available on the HIV Prevention England [website](#) If you require further information, please contact [Rob.bacon@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Rob.bacon@hertfordshire.gov.uk)