

County Durham Sexual Health Strategy



2023 – 2028



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Executive Summary

Sexual health refers to the state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality and covers many topics. Sexual health services must be provided by law as they are an important part of our overall health. They are delivered in various places, by local authorities, GPs, pharmacies, voluntary and community sector organisations, schools, colleges, universities and youth services.

This strategy sets out the ambitions for the overall sexual health of people in County Durham, improve access to sexual health services, promote healthy sexual behaviour, reduce rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies and reduce health disparities.

It sets out why sexual health is important and outlines County Durham's vision and priority areas over the next five years. It has been developed in partnership with organisations that deliver services, the NHS, voluntary and community sector organisations and residents.

The five priority areas of the strategy which we will focus on are:

1. Access high quality, age-appropriate Relationship Education (RE), and Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) for all (across the life course)?

- continuing to support schools and colleges to develop and implement an RE/RSHE curriculum.
- targeting support (where necessary) to mainstream education settings and alternative education providers.
- targeting support for children and young people in their communities and in community venues to help support RE/RSHE in a variety of ways.

2. Providing pregnancy support for young parents by:

- supporting the development of health promotional messages for vulnerable young people.
- working with our relevant NHS Trusts and wider partners to provide effective post-natal contraception and supporting access to contraception choices.
- continuing to help young parents to enable them to access work, education and training.

3. Improving access and increasing awareness of different types of contraception by:

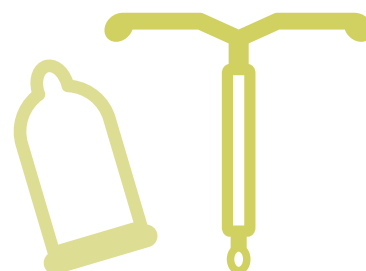
- increasing the take up of Long Acting Reversible Contraception methods such as the coil, injection or implant across County Durham making sure services work well together to offer a choice of contraception.

4. Reducing the stigma of STIs and HIV, and focus on prevention and early intervention by:

- supporting community-based services including pharmacies through information sharing and training to promote early testing messages and normalise testing.
- increasing opportunities to access testing in the community increasing overall testing.

5. Supporting reproductive health through:

- a reduction of repeat number of termination of pregnancies that occur.
- working to support contraception choices.
- a reduction in the number of mothers who are smokers at the time they deliver their babies.
- increasing the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme.
- expanding work with older adults to provide the right type of sexual health services that meet their needs including contraception advice, healthy relationships, menopause and erectile dysfunction.



Foreword

I am incredibly pleased to introduce County Durham's Sexual Health Strategy, emphasising the significance of community partnerships, collaboration, and engagement. It is great to see that by working together we can create an environment that fosters open dialogue, support, and respect for everyone's sexual well-being, contributing to their overall health and happiness.

Collaboration with local organisations, healthcare providers, schools, colleges, and community groups has been a strength in County Durham for many years, helping to keep people healthy, and this important partnership working continues and is raising awareness, and reducing stigma surrounding sexual health issues.

I would like to express my gratitude to the dedicated professionals, community partners, and residents of County Durham for the support and commitment to sexual health during the creation of this strategy. Together, we can create a community that embraces sexual well-being, promotes healthy relationships, and ensures that everyone can lead fulfilling and empowered lives.

Councillor Chris Hood



Chris

**Councillor
Chris Hood**

Welcome to the Sexual Health Strategy for County Durham. Since 2013, Durham County Council has had the mandated responsibility to commission comprehensive, open access sexual health interventions and services. As the Director of Public Health, it is my responsibility to promote and protect all aspects of health and that includes the sexual health and well-being of the residents in our communities. Sexual health is an integral part of overall well-being, contributing to individuals' happiness and quality of life and essential for building healthy relationships.

This strategy reflects the collaborative efforts and achievements made over several years in advancing sexual health outcomes in County Durham. It provides insights into our understanding of the local sexual health data and needs and guides us in identifying priority areas and tailoring our ambitions to better meet the needs of the population moving forward.

I am proud to be able to highlight some specific programmes of work that support promoting sexual health and well-being throughout the county in the strategy, for example reducing the rates of teenage conceptions by 54% since 2010.

In addition, by recognising the importance of inclusivity and addressing health inequalities, we have strived to improve sexual health outcomes for all communities across County Durham. This strategy serves as a roadmap for our future endeavours, outlining our continued commitment to improving sexual health outcomes in County Durham.

I invite you to delve into this report, learn about our achievements, challenges, and plans for the future. I hope it inspires you to join us in our collective efforts to advance sexual health, reduce disparities, and foster a community where sexual well-being is valued and prioritised.

Director of Public Health



Amanda

Amanda Healy
Director of
Public Health

Guiding Principles

This strategy was developed based upon the following key principles:

- working together with multi agency partners who have an interest in sexual health support and services, including voluntary community sector organisations, local residents and young people.
- using data to tell us about sexual and reproductive health across County Durham.
- looking at evidence from national research and best practice to describe what works well.
- supporting existing and local strategies including County Durham's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- designing a strategy for all residents of County Durham and for all professionals working across County Durham.

What are we going to do?

We have set out key ambitions that reflect local need and national recommendations. These ambitions, developed with County Durham residents, including young people, will form the basis of a multi-agency action plan that uses the County Durham Wellbeing Principles to:

- ensure County Durham residents have the opportunity to influence how they access Sexual Health Services and support.
- empower communities by seeking their views and acting on the feedback they share.
- reflect data, particularly about high risk groups and develop services and support around these.
- use what is best practice nationally and what works in County Durham.
- help and support providers to ensure that their staff have the skills and knowledge they need.
- build on existing community assets, for example the co-location of services within the Family Hubs and supporting the local Start for Life offer.
- have a live action plan which can be updated to reflect the needs of residents, staff and all providers.

Vision

Everyone in County Durham will have access to high-quality and inclusive sexual health support.

This gives them the knowledge, self-assurance, and ability to make informed choices.

These choices promote physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing, which in turn reduce health inequalities, promote safer sexual practices and create healthier people and communities.

This strategy supports the work of the County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board and the vision is that:

‘County Durham is a healthy place, where people live well for longer’



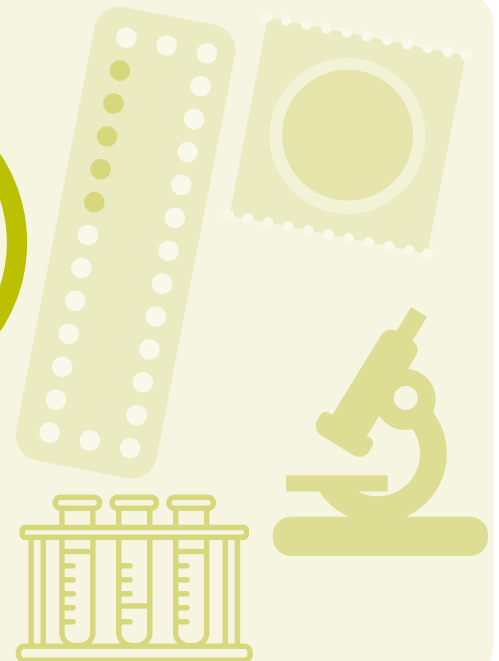
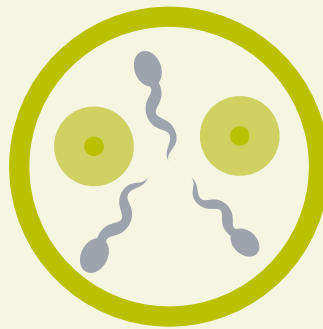
Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines sexual health in the following way:

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be protected, respected, and fulfilled.

Sexual health is a broad topic including:

- assault, violence, criminality.
- consent.
- contraception.
- discrimination.
- healthy relationships.
- HIV, diagnosis, prevention & treatment.
- prevention and health promotion.
- psychosexual counselling.
- reproductive health.
- sexual identity.
- sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) screening and treatments.
- termination of pregnancy.



If the sexual health advice and support a person receives is not right for them, they may feel undervalued, stigmatised, discriminated against, and left out. This can increase inequalities and lead to poorer health outcomes.

Evidence tells us that people are more likely to make better choices and build healthy relationships when they are knowledgeable, self-assured and know where to go for help and support. When people do this, it prevents problems from developing, increases wellbeing, encourages safer sexual practices, reduces inequalities, and creates healthier communities.

Sexual health is both physical sexual health and sexual wellbeing. Sexual wellbeing includes promoting sexual rights, healthy relationships, intimacy, sexual pleasure, and consent.

In County Durham, human rights and safety will be protected, all sexualities and genders will be respected, negative gender norms will not be tolerated, people of all ages will be free to develop confidence, knowledge, and skills in sexual health, and sexual wellbeing.

Context and considerations

The life course

Sexual Health needs change the older people get. It is important that children and young people access age-appropriate, high quality relationship education in their primary school settings and relationship, sex, and health education in their secondary education settings to develop their abilities helping them to make safer and informed choices during puberty. Adults may need tailored advice to keep them healthy including support and/or advice on sex and relationships, contraception, STI screening, pregnancy, menopause, sexual dysfunction, and screenings.

National context

The Health and Social Care Act (2012) sets out the main responsibilities for local areas including commissioning responsibilities for sexual health services between Local Authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICB).

Durham County Council is responsible for:

Screening and treatment for HIV and STI's, most contraceptive services and, some aspects of Psychosexual Counselling.

North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board is responsible for:

Commissioning termination of pregnancy services, sterilisation and vasectomy, non-sexual aspects of psychosexual counselling, maintaining the infrastructure of primary care and providing direct lines of communication with GPs and pharmacies.

Local context

In a large, geographically diverse population with small pockets of cultural diversity, the specific needs or cultural beliefs of the population should be identified and responded to.

Local factors such as unemployment, poor education, drug use, social isolation, financial problems, and being a member of a minority group or community can impact how people choose or access the services they need. By taking these things into account, health care providers can better meet the different needs of everyone in County Durham.

It is important to understand the populations in County Durham...

Census link: [How life has changed in County Durham: Census 2021 \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/census/2021/how-life-has-changed-in-county-durham)

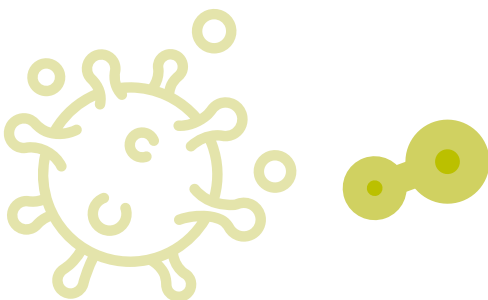
(Census 2021)

The diversity of population in and around Durham City is greater than the rest of the County, impacted by Durham University and, other large employers, based in the city

Durham University has a student population of around **20,000** students from **100 countries**, many of whom live in and around Durham City

(Census 2021)

Understanding the population means services will be able to better meet peoples varying needs.



Vulnerable Groups

People can belong to a vulnerable group for several reasons and sometimes a more targeted way of working with these groups can help promote better sexual health.

These groups include LGBTQ+, men who have sex with men (MSM), trans people, Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) communities, and other black and minoritised people.

Durham County Council is White Ribbon accredited and works with partners to promote White Ribbon Day and the White Ribbon core values. This includes challenging harmful attitudes and helping to build gender equality across countywide services.



Work to address issues relating to domestic abuse, sexual violence and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is ongoing, promoting sexual safety and security in communities.

Cost of living

In County Durham the levels of deprivation are higher than the England average and nearly half of the population (47%) live in areas in the top 30% most deprived areas in England (IMD 2019).

(Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019)

Around 1 in 4 residents and 1 in 3 children are estimated to live in relative poverty



More information can be found by accessing this link:

[County Durham Poverty Overview V2 | County Durham | Report Builder for ArcGIS \(durhaminsight.info\)](#)

The cost of living means many more people are struggling financially and may stop prioritising their sexual health. This could mean that more people might be at risk of STI's or unplanned pregnancies. This needs to be reflected in service accessibility to reduce the impact from travel costs as well as access to resources including contraception.

Rural Considerations

County Durham is a largely rural area, and most people live in towns, villages or Durham City. What this means is that service delivery is not the same for everyone, making it more challenging to support sexual health and wellbeing that is equal for everyone. The aim of this strategy is to make sure service access is fair and everyone can get the right support, at the right time to meet their needs,



Priority Area 1: Relationships Education, and Relationship, Sex and Health Education across the life course

Young people who report receiving positive RE and RSHE are more likely to:

- delay early sex.
- experience early sex which is consensual and have a smaller age gap with their partner, potentially reducing the risk of intimate partner violence.
- be aware of, or report sexual abuse.
- protect early sex with contraception and condoms.
- be less likely to contract a sexually transmitted infection.

**Student
voice**

**survey
responses**

73% of children and young people who responded said adults talk to them about healthy relationships.

(Taken from Student voice survey action plan – 22/23)

Key Achievements:

- An established whole systems approach to Relationship Education for primary age pupils.
- An established whole system approach to Relationship, Sex and Health Education for secondary age pupils.

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and protecting the rights of the child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is made up of 54 articles or statements, it explains how adults and governments must work together to make sure children's rights are protected and has been used in UK law since 1992. Durham County Council and all the organisations working in partnership across the sexual health system support and promote all aspects of the UNCRC and work directly and indirectly to respect and promote children's rights.

“As a parent I believe that the education my child receives about Relationship Education (RE) from school is suitable, informative, and age appropriate. I am happy that this is part of the teaching at his school as I feel it helps keep him safe and healthy” (Parent, child age 6)

Under 18 Relationship Education (RE), and Relationship, Sex and Health Education (RSHE)

Today's children live online and offline in a complex world. This offers exciting and challenging opportunities. In this context, children and young people must learn how to stay safe and healthy and manage their relationships, including intimate sexual ones at an age-appropriate time.

Young people need clear and relevant information to make educated decisions about their wellness, physical health and mental health. Supporting all children and young people to access high-quality, age appropriate RE/RSHE can contribute to positive teenage relationships, reduce unplanned pregnancies, boost confidence and promote resilience creating capable young people, able to make informed choices.

What is RE and RSHE?

RE/RSHE is delivered in County Durham in line with all government guidance and evidence-based interventions, including the Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022 statutory guidance. This means that:

- primary school pupils will participate in Relationship Education that teaches children the essential skills necessary to build positive, enjoyable, and non-exploitative relationships. This will sit alongside the essential understanding of how to be healthy.
- secondary school students will participate in Relationship, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) learning about physical, sexual, moral and emotional development. Students will develop their understanding of health and the importance of stable and loving relationships, both on and off-line, respect, love and care for family life.
- special schools understand that rehearsing and embedding the knowledge and practical skills supports independent and fulfilling adult lives. RSHE is taught in special schools to children in County Durham in an adapted way that supports different learners levels of understanding and specific SEND needs.

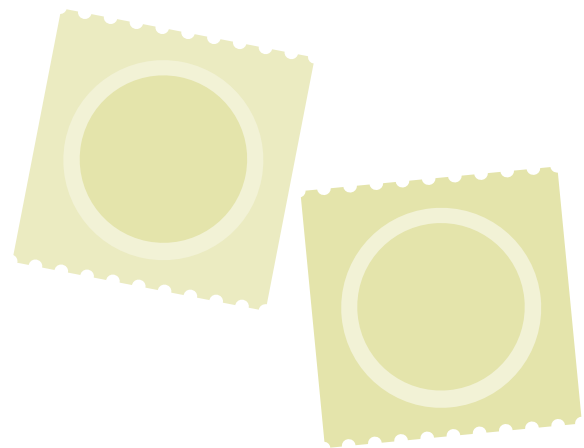
The [Relationship Education / Relationship, Sex and Health Education guidance](#) sets out the legal duties schools must comply with when teaching RSE and RSHE, as well as setting out some more detailed expectations of school, including teaching these subjects in an age-appropriate way.

Not all RSHE is delivered in and through education settings, for some young people in County Durham, their sexual health education and support needs are enhanced by accessing additional wrap around provision available through youth and community groups, and specialist clinical services.

Relationship, Sex and Health Education in adulthood

Healthy adult relationships involve honesty, trust, respect, and open communication. Intimate partners and friendships should be respectful and you should enjoy each other's company.

Close relationships and friendships can be very important for overall wellbeing and can be encouraged through a variety of community activities across County Durham. Support services are also available to help partners resolve specific issues. County Durham's Integrated Sexual Health service provides comprehensive advice and guidance to adults about contraception, relationships, sexually transmitted infections (STI's) and pregnancy decision making.



Our Ambitions

- Support the delivery of relationship education in primary schools.
- Support the delivery of relationship, sex and health education in secondary schools.
- Targeted support to identified vulnerable communities including children and young people.
- Support parents and carers to have age appropriate, open and honest conversations with children about healthy relationships.
- Support parent and carers to have age appropriate, open honest conversations with young people about sex and relationships.

Priority Area 2: Teenage Conceptions, Pregnancy and support for young parents

In County Durham...

The under 18 conception rates have fallen in the last 10 years, but at 19.8 per 1,000 this is **significantly higher** than England



(2020)

Significantly fewer under 18 conceptions lead to an abortion compared to England

46%
County Durham

53%
England

(2021)

There are around 50 teenage mothers each year; 1.4% of all deliveries which is **significantly higher** than England



(2021/22)

Key Achievements:

- An established and successful Young Parents Programme is delivered across County Durham where participants report improvements in all areas of their lives.
- A young person's Mobile Sexual Health Outreach Service that targets areas of high need across County Durham.



Teenage Conceptions and Pregnancy

Most teenagers do not plan a pregnancy, but poor sex education and a lack of contraception advice leaves them vulnerable. Some teenagers without support may not know what to do, who to tell, or where to go for information. Even teenagers with support may still find a pregnancy affects school, their friendships, and their mental health.

In County Durham, under 18 teenage conceptions have reduced by **54%** since 2010. This is a positive trend, further work is still required to narrow the gap between County Durham and England.



Durham County Council and other partners work together following the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Framework and The Framework for Supporting Teenage Mothers and Young Fathers. These are designed to:

- help local areas assess their local programmes to see what's working well.
- identify any gaps in services.
- strengthen the prevention and support pathways for all young people, young parents and their children.

Both frameworks provide an evidence-based structure for a collaborative whole system approach to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies and support teenage parents.

Young women who access high quality RSHE are less likely to be pregnant by 18 and are less likely to experience an unplanned pregnancy in later life.

Support for Young Parents

Young parents can experience lots of connected inequalities which impact on their health and wellbeing. Getting the right support at the right time is important to help young parents, and:

- is integral to improving life chances.
- is key to giving every child the best start in life.
- can break intergenerational inequalities.
- Can reduce future demand on health and social services.

The County Durham Young Parents Pathway brings together local partners to provide practical support to young parents that enhances their own development and the development of their child.

Participant feedback is positive and many young parents are supported into further learning and employment after completing the programme.

“I have learnt to try and do different activities with my daughter to help her grow and develop the best she can.”

“Going to the parenting group I have made new friends, learnt new things and the packs have helped me do fun activities with my children.”

“The programme was fantastic, my confidence has grown so much from the support that I am now looking and applying for apprenticeships, the packs have been amazing. I would highly recommend the course.”

(Participants evaluations 2022)

Our Ambitions

- Deliver a range of key sexual health, health promotion messages to young people targeting vulnerable groups.
- Continue to provide bespoke interventions to young parents that help prevent repeat pregnancies and increase pathways into employment, education and training.

Priority Area 3: Contraception

In County Durham...

Since 2016 the prescribing of LARCs (excluding injections) has been **significantly lower** than the North East and England.

9.8 per
1,000



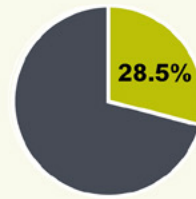
(2020)

Significantly fewer people under the age of 25 years attend specialist contraception service compared to England as a whole.

51 per
1,000
females

3 per
1,000
males

(2020)



Over a quarter of termination of pregnancy in those aged under 25 years are repeat abortions. The proportion is **increasing over time** and this is the case for County Durham and England.

(2021)

“Which method of contraception suits me?”

“Where can I get contraception?”

“I’m under 16 – can I get contraception?”

Feedback from Durham City Centre Youth Project Survey 2021.

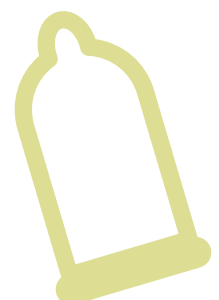
Key Achievements:

- Over 200 C-Card outlets across County Durham.
- The online offer includes access to condoms and some types of contraceptive pill.
- Pharmacies are delivering a range of contraception services in communities across County Durham.
- Services worked well together across the system to offer a choice of contraception during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Access to services, getting the right advice and having a choice of contraception methods is important to a person’s sexual wellbeing.

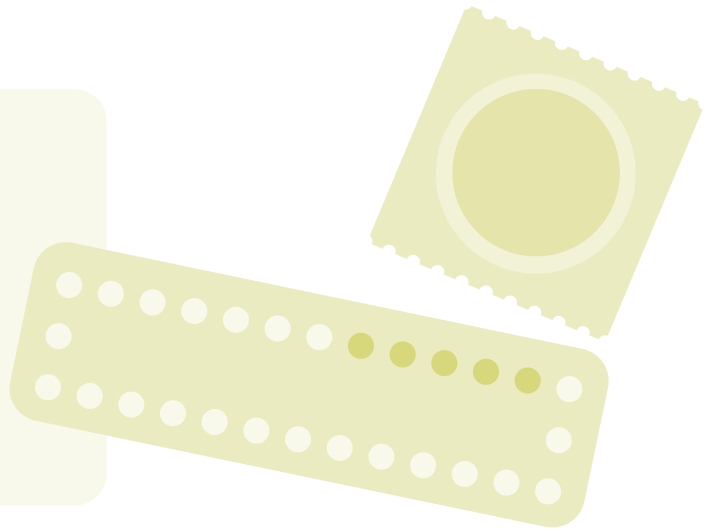
Services in County Durham follow all best practice guidance from The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), the Office of Health Improvements and Disparities (OHID) and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) including offering a choice of free contraception along with advice and clinics to discuss a variety of health and relationship issues.

When choosing contraception, the method that works best will depend on several factors. In County Durham you can be supported by a range of services, that offer advice and support helping people make the choice that is right for them.



In County Durham you can get contraception free of charge

- Sexual health or GUM (genitourinary medicine) clinics.
- GP (General Practitioners) surgeries.
- Some young people's services.
- Pharmacies.
- Online.



Post-natal contraception is an important part of contraception provision, and an area of development in County Durham.

Having a planned pregnancy allows couples or individuals to be emotionally and mentally prepared for parenthood. It enhances the chances of a healthy pregnancy and reduces potential risks.



Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARCs) is more reliable as it does not need to be taken every day, however, over recent years, data shows that the use of LARCs has declined across County Durham.



75% of users rated the online condom offer as excellent.

Feedback from County Durham's Integrated Sexual Health Service

Our Ambitions

- Understand the reasons for the decline of the use of LARCs in order to improve the offer and increase the uptake across the system.
- Further develop the C-Card Scheme including the digital offer.
- Continue to support Community Pharmacies with their offer including the delivery of enhanced contraception services in line with other local and national services.
- Develop a workforce that has the knowledge and skills to deliver the right support /service at the right time.
- Work collaboratively with maternity services and wider partners to further develop the postnatal contraception pathway.

Priority Area 4: Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV

In County Durham...



Between 2,000 and 3,000 new STIs are diagnosed each year at a rate which is **significantly lower** than England.

(2021)

40 per
100,000
Gonorrhoea

Diagnostic rates of gonorrhoea and syphilis are **significantly lower** than the North East and England.

(2021)

4 per
100,000
Syphilis



1 in 7 people aged 15-24 years are screened for chlamydia. The screening and detection rate is **significantly lower** than across England.

(2021)

Key Achievements:

- County Durham residents have access to a comprehensive online screening offer.
- All County Durham residents have access to an Integrated Sexual Health Service.
- County Durham's Community Pharmacy Network provides a range of sexual health interventions including local access to free Emergency Oral Hormonal Oral Contraception and C-Card services and ongoing national supplies of contraception.

In County Durham there is a robust multi-agency response to the identification of STI's that includes the Local Authority and NHS services working together. Work on outbreaks and antibiotic resistance is ongoing to protect the overall health of people living in County Durham.

Between **2,000 and 3,000** new STI's are diagnosed in County Durham residents each year.

Half of newly diagnosed STIs are in young people aged **15-24 years**.

The rates of new diagnoses are higher in the more deprived areas of the county.

Reinfection rate (an indicator of high-risk behaviour) in County Durham is lower than the England average.



STI's and reinfections are an avoidable health risk that can cause sexual and reproductive illnesses.

Using a condom is a safe and responsible way to have sex, they provide a physical barrier that can help prevent the spread of STI's including HIV, Chlamydia, Syphilis, Gonorrhoea and Herpes.

HIV

In County Durham...

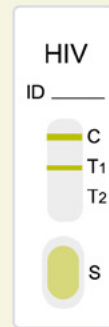


The rate of people living with HIV (aged 15-59 years) and the rate of people newly diagnosed with HIV is **significantly lower** than England.

(2021)

The proportion of people attending specialist sexual health services and tested for HIV is **significantly lower** than England.

32% County Durham
46% England



(2021)

99.7%

of those accessing HIV care, receive treatment to suppress the virus, this is **significantly higher** than England. "Undetectable equals Untransmittable."

(2021)

An HIV diagnosis today means living with a long-term condition. The introduction of Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) means that some more vulnerable people can access treatment that reduces the risk of contracting HIV. This helps support the work to tackle HIV, prevent onward transmission, enabling people to live healthy lives.

With an early diagnosis and effective treatments, most people living with HIV will not develop any AIDS-related illnesses and will have a near-normal lifespan.

Wider access to screening has changed the landscape of HIV prevention.

Health promotion messages should focus on promoting the use of condoms.



National Chlamydia Screening Programme (NCSP)

Chlamydia is the most commonly diagnosed STI in England. Most of the harm is caused by untreated Chlamydia is in women. The NCSP focuses on reducing reinfections, reproductive harm, and onward transmission. The programme also raises awareness of good sexual health.

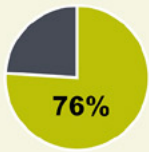
Following the introduction of the National Chlamydia Screening Programme data for 2021 shows County Durham's detection rate was 1,588 per 100,000 - lower than figures for the North East and England, respectively.

Our Ambitions

- Create a bespoke steering group to continue tackling emerging issues and promote prevention strategies.
- Reduce the stigma associated with living with HIV and STI's.
- Continue to support community-based services including community pharmacies to deliver contraception services and interventions.
- Increase opportunities to access screening including in community-based community-based settings.
- Deliver an effective National Chlamydia Screening Programme.

Priority Area 5: Reproductive Health

In County Durham...



The coverage for cervical screening (aged 25-49 years) is **significantly higher** than England.

(2022)

The proportion of abortions performed under 10 weeks is **significantly lower** than England.

84%
Durham

89%
England

(2021)



Around 1 in 6 mothers are smokers when they have their baby, **significantly higher** than England.

14.6%

(2021/22)

Key Achievements:

- Opportunistic and planned cervical screening is offered within the Integrated Sexual Health Service.
- High take up of screening programmes during pregnancy.

Screening and vaccinations

Access to screening and vaccinations contributes to better sexual health.

There are many screening programmes available. Accessing the right one(s) is really important. Screening means that health problems might be found much earlier and people can get the right treatment sooner.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine -

protects against genital warts and cancer (cervical and some head, neck, anal and genital cancers). It is given to all genders.

Uptake of the vaccination has been falling in County Durham since 2019/20.

57.8% of girls

45.3% of boys



(2021/22)

Cervical screening

Cervical Screening is a test for all women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 years which can help prevent cervical cancer.

The screening programme in County Durham has maintained high coverage for over a decade, compared to the North East and England. Coverage for 2021:

76% aged 25-49 years  **77%** aged 50-64 years

A person's sex at birth, hormones or surgeries could impact on screening requirements and trans and non-binary people may need screening for the specific health needs aligned to male or female specific reproductive organs and not aligned to their gender. Screening programmes must be inclusive and considerate of how people's medical needs might not match their gender identity.

From puberty to menopause, women, assigned female at birth, can have a range of sexual health needs. Making up 51% of the population and 47% of the workforce, their overall health can affect their families, jobs, communities, and society. It is important that there is information available to support people to make decisions about their health without embarrassment or judgment from others.

Pregnancy

In County Durham people are asked to contact their GP as soon as possible after finding out you are pregnant for access to the maternity services pathway.

In County Durham Trans men and non-binary people assigned female at birth who are pregnant will be offered the same antenatal and newborn screening tests.



Maternity services in England provide infectious disease in pregnancy screening for HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B. The County Durham uptake is **99%**.

Unplanned Pregnancies

An unplanned pregnancy is a pregnancy that occurs when no children, or no more children were anticipated. A reduction in unplanned pregnancies supports people's wellbeing.

Some unplanned pregnancies lead to a termination of pregnancy. The earlier the termination of pregnancy occurs, the lower the risks and complications can be and are an indicator of service quality.

In County Durham, termination of pregnancy under 10 weeks have been consistently and significantly below the England average. County Durham's rank within England for this indicator was 144th out of 149th.

Repeat terminations can have an emotional impact on people and are often an indicator of other unmet needs.

Trying to get pregnant

The North East including County Durham has a significantly lower fertility rate than England as a whole. However, over the previous 10 years the fertility rate in County Durham has followed regional and national trends.

Risk factors of poor maternal health during pregnancy and smoking while pregnant. In County Durham we have higher rates than the England average.



This has fallen since 2010 but still **1 in 6 (14.6%)** people smoke at the time of delivery (2021 – 2022) and that number is significantly worse than the North East and England data.

Being healthy before trying to conceive including, eating well, exercising, not smoking, and avoiding alcohol is important. People wishing to conceive should take folic acid and prenatal vitamins. County Durham GPs and community pharmacists can provide up-to-date advice and support.



General menstrual health can include short-term symptoms such as heavy or irregular periods, menstrual pain, and premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Promoting equitable access to menstrual hygiene products, educating the public generally about menstrual hygiene practices, and addressing the stigma surrounding menstruation can support and normalise this.

Menopause

Often between **45 to 55**, although it can happen earlier or later the menopause is when periods stop due to reduced hormones.



It is important that people affected can access high-quality, personalised menopause care with their GP and, if needed, specialist care in a timely manner, and inequalities in access to menopause treatment are reduced. Anyone experiencing the menopause should be able to access the full range of treatment options.

Miscarriage and stillbirth

An estimated 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage with a smaller number of pregnancies ending as ectopic or molar pregnancies and still births.

At any stage, either an early loss or a later loss will affect an individual or family's wellbeing. There are local and national services that can support people, families, and services that can offer advice to employers on how to support their employees.

Other common reproductive health issues

There are other reproductive health issues that can affect a person's wellbeing.

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a hormonal condition that can affect many health outcomes. Awareness raising can help people to live better with support or lifestyle modifications.

Endometriosis, where the womb lining grows abnormally, like PCOS, can cause pain and poor health affecting people's happiness and wellbeing. GPs can support and offer treatments.

Sexual Dysfunction

Sexual dysfunction refers to a broad range of difficulties that can occur at any stage. These difficulties can affect individuals or couples and may interfere with their ability to experience satisfaction and pleasure. Sexual dysfunction can have physical, psychological or relational causes and it can occur in men and women.

Some people might need support for erectile dysfunction, (ED). Being unable to get an erection or keep an erection long enough to have sex can be embarrassing, upsetting and damaging to people's happiness, relationships and mental health.

Other common types of sexual dysfunction include premature ejaculation, this condition occurs when a man ejaculates sooner than desired during a sexual activity.

Women can be affected by conditions such as Female Sexual Arousal Disorder, this refers to the difficulty or inability of a woman to become aroused during sexual activities and can be linked to hormonal imbalances, medications, stress and trauma. The NHS offers advice on all of these conditions, and GP's can help with medication and other interventions.

Our Ambitions

- Reduce the rate of repeat termination of pregnancy.
- Continue to reduce the rate of smoking at the time of delivery.
- Increase access to and uptake of HPV vaccination programme to pre-pandemic levels.
- Expand work with adults of all ages to provide the right type of sexual health services, at the right time, including, healthy relationships, contraception, support for menopause and sexual dysfunction.

Abbreviations

A2W	Approach to Wellbeing
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CDDFT	County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
GP	General Practitioner
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPV	Human Papillomavirus
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IUD	Intrauterine Device - Non-Hormonal copper coil
IUS	Intrauterine System - Hormonal coil
LA	Local Authority
LARC	Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptive
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning or any other associated identity.
MSM	Men who have sex with Men
NENC ICB	North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
RHE	Relationships and Health Education
RSHE	Relationships, Sex and Health Education
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UKHSA	UK Health Security Agency
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WHO	World Health Organisation

Glossary of Terms

Abortion: Deliberately ending a pregnancy by the removal of pregnancy tissue, products of conception or the foetus and placenta from the uterus. The preferred terminology is now Termination of Pregnancy.

AIDS: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, a late stage of HIV infection where the immune system is severely damaged, making the individual vulnerable to opportunistic infections.

Bilateral Oophorectomy: Surgical removal of both ovaries, often performed as a treatment for certain conditions or as part of gender-affirming surgeries.

Body Autonomy: The right of individuals to have control over their own bodies, including decisions related to sexual activity, reproduction, and medical interventions.

Cervical Screening: A medical examination that involves the collection of cells from the cervix to detect abnormalities and early signs of cervical cancer.

Chlamydia: A common sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*, often asymptomatic but can lead to complications if left untreated.

Cisgender: Refers to individuals whose gender identity matches the sex assigned to them at birth.

Condoms: Barrier devices used during sexual intercourse to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies.

Consent: Voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity. It must be given without coercion, manipulation, or incapacitation.

Gender Identity: An individual's deeply-held sense of their gender, which may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth.

Gonorrhoea: A sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, which can infect the genital tract, rectum, and throat.

Herpes: A common viral infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV), characterized by recurring outbreaks of painful blisters on the skin or mucous membranes.

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus, a virus that attacks the immune system, weakening its ability to fight off infections and diseases.

Hysterectomy: Surgical removal of the uterus, often performed to treat various gynaecological conditions.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV): A group of sexually transmitted viruses that can cause genital warts and certain types of cancers, including cervical cancer.

Intimacy: Emotional closeness and connection between individuals, including physical affection, trust, and open communication.

LARCs: Long-Acting reversible contraception, such as a copper coil, a hormonal coil, the contraceptive injection and a hormonal implant. These methods can last between 3 months to 5 years and do not require the user to remember to take any medication on a daily basis.

Life-course: Refers to the various stages and transitions individuals experience throughout their lives, including childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and older age.

LGBTQ+: An acronym representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning individuals, and other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Non-binary: Refers to individuals whose gender identity does not exclusively align with being male or female.

Oral Contraception: Birth control methods that involve the use of hormonal pills taken orally to prevent pregnancy.

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP): Medication taken by individuals at high risk of contracting HIV to reduce the likelihood of infection.

Glossary of Terms

Relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education:

The statutory phrase used within the guidance to schools by the Department for Education, relating to the teaching of children regarding relationships, sex and health. More commonly in society, these terms are referred to as Relationships Education (RE) in primary schools and Relationship, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) in secondary schools. It is important to know that both RE & RSE includes teaching about health and both RE & RSE are taught age appropriate topics.

Reproductive Health: The state of physical and mental wellbeing related to the reproductive system, including fertility, pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care.

Screenings: Medical tests or examinations conducted to detect diseases, conditions, or risk factors in individuals who do not exhibit symptoms.

Sexual Education: Formal or informal learning about human sexuality, including information about anatomy, reproduction, relationships, consent, and safe sexual practices.

Sexual Health: The state of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing related to sexuality.

Sexual Orientation: An individual's emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to others, such as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or pansexual.

Sexual Violence: Any unwanted sexual act or activity, including rape, sexual assault, harassment, and coercion.

Syphilis: A sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*, which can progress through various stages if left untreated, affecting multiple organ systems.

Termination of pregnancy: The preferred terminology for the removal of pregnancy tissue, products of conception or the foetus and placenta from the uterus. Often termed abortion.

Trans men: Individuals who were assigned female at birth but identify and live as men.

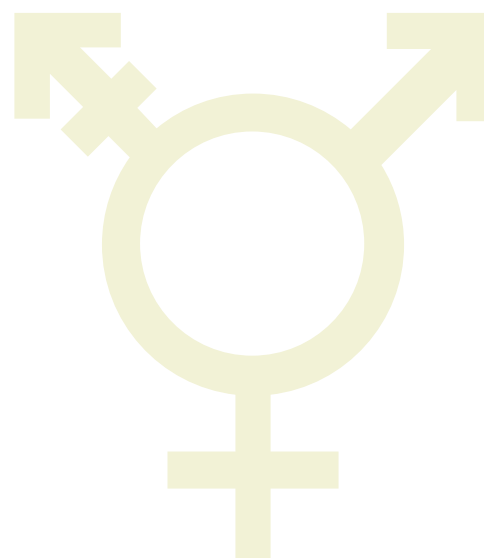
Trans women: Individuals who were assigned male at birth but identify and live as women.

Transgender: An umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth.

Vaccinations: Administration of vaccines to stimulate the immune system and provide protection against specific infectious diseases.

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG): Any form of harmful behaviour targeted towards women and girls due to their gender, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

White Ribbon: An international campaign that aims to end violence against women by engaging men and boys as allies.



Professional Resources and Tools

- ➔ The “British Association for Sexual health and HIV [About BASHH | British Association for Sexual Health and HIV](#)” Is the merger of the Medical Society for the Study of Venereal Diseases and the Association for Genitourinary Medicine. The object is to promote and improve diagnosing, treating, and managing sexual health.
- ➔ [HIV prevention resources](#) are available for free by [HIV Prevention England](#), the national HIV prevention programme.
- ➔ [Sexual and reproductive health information for professionals](#) is provided via the national programme Sexwise – www.sexwise.org.uk
- ➔ [Reproductive health is a public health issue](#) is a series of 3 documents about reproductive health impacts and healthcare needs of females and can be used as a reference point for healthcare professionals to inform prioritisation and planning.
- ➔ The [teenage pregnancy prevention framework](#) provides guidance for local areas on maintaining reductions and narrowing inequalities in under 18 conception rates
- ➔ The [framework for supporting teenage mothers and young fathers](#) sets out the importance of dedicated support for young parents
- ➔ The [syphilis action plan](#) provides guidance to optimise the 4 pillars that are essential to syphilis control and prevention:
 - increase testing frequency
 - deliver partner notification to British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) standards
 - maintain high antenatal screening
 - sustain targeted health promotion.
- ➔ Changes to the [National Chlamydia Screening Programme \(NCSP\)](#) were announced in 2021 to focus on reducing reproductive harm.
- ➔ The “Women’s reproductive health programme: progress, products and next steps [Women’s reproductive health programme: progress, products and next steps - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).”
- ➔ The [British Menopause Society British Menopause Society | For healthcare professionals and others specialising in post reproductive health \(thebms.org.uk\)](#) is the specialist authority for menopause and reproductive health
- ➔ The Miscarriage association [The Miscarriage Association: Pregnancy loss information and support](#) supports anyone affected by miscarriage.

References

[Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV](#)

[A Framework for Sexual Health Improvement in England](#)

[Syphilis Action Plan](#)

[Women’s Reproductive Health Programme](#)

[Miscarriage and the workplace - The Miscarriage Association](#)

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Telephone: 03000 264 109

Email: PublicHealth@durham.gov.uk