Spotlight on sexually transmitted infections in the North West

2016 data
About Public Health England

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1 Summary

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) represent an important public health problem in the North West. Out of all the Public Health England centres it has the second highest rate of new STIs in England.

More than 54,300 new STIs were diagnosed in North West residents in 2016, representing a rate of 757 diagnoses per 100,000 population. Rates by upper tier local authority ranged from 491 new STI diagnoses per 100,000 population in Cumbria to 1,424 new STI diagnoses per 100,000 population in Manchester.

The number of new STIs diagnosed in North West residents fell by 3% between 2015 and 2016. Falls were seen in the numbers of most of the five major STIs: chlamydia decreased by 2%, genital herpes by <1% and genital warts by 11%. Syphilis increased by 34% and gonorrhoea by 13%.

PHE recommends that local areas should be working towards achieving a chlamydia detection rate of at least 2,300 per 100,000 among individuals aged 15 to 24 years and this is an indicator in the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF).

In 2016 the chlamydia diagnosis rate among North West residents aged 15 to 24 years was 2,247 per 100,000 residents.

Men and women have similar rates of new STIs (745 and 757 per 100,000 residents respectively).

Where gender and sexual orientation are known, men who have sex with men (MSM) account for 13% of North West residents diagnosed with a new STI in a specialist sexual health clinic (SHC) (80% of those diagnosed with syphilis and 46% of those diagnosed with gonorrhoea).

STIs disproportionately affect young people. North West residents aged between 15 and 24 years accounted for 57% of all new STI diagnoses in 2016.

The white ethnic group has the highest number of new STI diagnoses: over 33,700 (89%). Although only 1% of new STIs are in black Caribbeans, they have the highest rate: 2,162 per 100,000, which is 4 times the rate seen in the white ethnic group. Where country of birth was known, 90% of North West residents diagnosed in a specialist SHC in 2016 with a new STI were UK-born.
Implications for prevention

The impact of STIs remains greatest in young heterosexuals 15 to 24 years, black ethnic minorities and MSM, and Public Health England (PHE) is conducting and managing a number of initiatives to address this inequality.

To improve the sexual health of young people, PHE is undertaking formative research for a health promotion campaign to promote condom use and positive sexual relationships among this population. Additionally, statutory, high-quality relationship and sex education at all secondary schools will equip young people with the information and skills to improve their sexual health.

There is a notable variation in the chlamydia detection rate among 15 to 24 year olds by geographic area, often reflecting rates of testing. Local authorities with detection rates below the PHOF recommended indicator of 2,300 per 100,000 population should consider means to promote chlamydia screening to most effectively detect and control chlamydia infections.

Local areas should focus on embedding chlamydia screening for 15 to 24 year olds into a variety of non-specialist SHCs and community-based settings, focusing on those which serve the populations with the highest need based on positivity. They should also emphasise the need for repeat screening annually and on change of sexual partner, as well as the need for re-testing after a positive diagnosis within three months of initial diagnosis; and ensure treatment and partner notification standards are met.

To help local areas improve their chlamydia detection rate in 15 to 24 year olds, PHE developed the chlamydia care pathway to outline comprehensive case management for an episode of chlamydia testing, diagnosis and treatment.

Of particular concern is the continuing rise of syphilis nationally among MSM. There is evidence that condomless sex associated with HIV sero-adaptive behaviours (which includes selecting partners perceived to be of the same HIV sero-status), is leading to increased STI transmission.

Nationally, the rate of acute bacterial STIs in HIV-positive MSM is up to four times that of MSM who were HIV-negative or of unknown HIV status. This suggests that rapid STI transmission is occurring in dense sexual networks of HIV-positive MSM. Sero-adaptive behaviour increases the risk of infection with STIs, hepatitis B and C, and sexually transmissible enteric infections like Shigella spp. For those who are HIV negative, sero-adaptive behaviour increases the risk of HIV seroconversion as 13% of MSM nationally are unaware of their infection.
As MSM continue to experience high rates of STIs they remain a priority for targeted STI prevention and health promotion work. HIV Prevention England have been contracted to deliver, on behalf of PHE, a range of activities which include promoting condom use and awareness of STIs, which are particularly aimed at MSM.

The continued reduction in genital warts is associated with the high coverage of HPV vaccination in adolescent girls through the National HPV Vaccination Programme. While young heterosexual men stand to benefit from female only HPV vaccination through herd protection, this is not necessarily the case for MSM. As a result, a targeted HPV vaccination pilot programme for MSM was introduced in England in 2016 to inform the potential national rollout of vaccination of MSM attending specialist SHCs and HIV clinics: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hpv-vaccination-pilot-for-men-who-have-sex-with-men-msm.

HPV vaccination of MSM will provide direct protection against HPV infection with the aim of reducing the incidence of genital warts and HPV-related cancers.

The high rate of STI diagnoses among black ethnic communities is most likely the consequence of a complex interplay of cultural, economic and behavioural factors. HIV Prevention England also delivers, on behalf of PHE, prevention activity targeted at these groups. PHE is collaborating with academic institutions to improve understanding of the behaviours, attitudes, and other factors influencing their STI risk and support the delivery of timely interventions which maximise patient and public health benefit.

Health promotion and education remain vital for STI prevention, through improving risk awareness and encouraging safer sexual behaviour. Consistent and correct condom use substantially reduces the risk of being infected with an STI. Prevention efforts should include condom provision, ensuring open access to sexual health services with STI screening and robust contact tracing, and should focus on groups at highest risk such as young people, black ethnic minorities and MSM. Effective commissioning of high quality sexual health services, as highlighted in the Framework for Sexual Health Improvement in England, will promote delivery of these key messages.

**PHE’s key messages**

Statutory, high-quality relationship and sex education in secondary schools will equip young people with the skills to improve their sexual health and overall wellbeing.

Strengthened local and national prevention activities need to focus on groups at highest risk, including young adults, black ethnic minorities and MSM.
Consistent and correct use of condoms can significantly reduce risk of STIs.

Rapid, open access to treatment and partner notification can reduce the risk of complications and infection spread.

Regular testing for HIV and STIs is essential for good sexual health:

- anyone under 25 who is sexually active should be screened for chlamydia annually, and on change of sexual partner
- MSM should test annually for HIV and STIs and every three months if having condomless sex with new or casual partners
- black ethnic minority men and women should have a regular STI screen, including an HIV test, if having condomless sex with new or casual partners
2 Charts, tables and maps

Figure 1: New STI diagnoses by Public Health England centre (PHEC) of residence: England 2016  Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

Any increase in gonorrhoea diagnoses may be due to the increased use of highly sensitive nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs) and additional screening of extra-genital sites in MSM.
Any decrease in genital wart diagnoses may be due to a moderately protective effect of HPV-16/18 vaccination.
Any increase in genital herpes diagnoses may be due to the use of more sensitive NAATs. Increases or decreases may also reflect changes in testing practices.
Figure 3: Diagnosis rates of the five main STIs: North West residents, 2012-2016
Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

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Any decrease in genital wart diagnoses may be due to a moderately protective effect of HPV-16/18 vaccination.

Any increase in genital herpes diagnoses may be due to the use of more sensitive NAATs. Increases or decreases may also reflect changes in testing practices.

Table 1: Percentage change in new STI diagnoses: North West residents
Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnoses</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>% change 2012-2016</th>
<th>% change 2015-2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New STIs</td>
<td>54,339</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhoea</td>
<td>3,584</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>29,965</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Herpes</td>
<td>4,190</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Warts</td>
<td>8,086</td>
<td>-22%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see notes for Figure 3.
Spotlight on STIs in the North West

Figure 4: Rate of new STIs per 100,000 residents by age group in the North West, 2016  Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

Figure 5: Rates by ethnicity per 100,000 population of North West residents diagnosed with a new STI: 2016  Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

Table 2: Proportion of North West residents diagnosed with a new STI by ethnicity: 2016  Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage excluding unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>33,750</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other BME</td>
<td>2,948</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>16,338</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6: Proportions of North West residents diagnosed with a new STI by world region of birth: 2016  Data sources: GUMCAD data only

![Proportions of North West residents diagnosed with a new STI by world region of birth: 2016](image)

Figure 7: Diagnoses of the five main STIs among MSM in specialist SHCs: North West residents, 2012-2016  Data source: GUMCAD data only

![Diagnoses of the five main STIs among MSM in specialist SHCs: North West residents, 2012-2016](image)

GUMCAD started in 2009. Reporting of sexual orientation is less likely to be complete for earlier years, so rises seen may be partly artefactual.

Any increase in gonorrhoea diagnoses may be due to the increased use of highly sensitive nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs) and additional screening of extra-genital sites in MSM.

Any decrease in genital wart diagnoses may be due to a moderately protective effect of HPV-16/18 vaccination.

Any increase in genital herpes diagnoses may be due to the use of more sensitive NAATs.

Any increase or decrease may reflect changes in testing.
### Table 3: Percentage change in new STI diagnoses in MSM diagnosed in specialist SHCs: North West residents

Data sources: GUMCAD data only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnoses</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>% change 2012-2016</th>
<th>% change 2015-2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New STIs</td>
<td>4,697</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhoea</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>1,057</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Herpes</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Warts</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see notes for Figure 7.

### Figure 8a: Rate of new STI diagnoses per 100,000 population among North West residents by upper tier local authority of residence: 2016

Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

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Spotlight on STIs in the North West
Figure 8b: Rate of new STI diagnoses (excluding chlamydia diagnoses in persons aged 15-24 years) per 100,000 population aged 15-64 years among North West residents by upper tier local authority of residence: 2016
Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

Figure 9: Chlamydia detection rate per 100,000 population aged 15-24 years in North West residents by upper tier local authority of residence: 2016
Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD
Figure 10: Rate of Gonorrhoea diagnoses per 100,000 population in North West residents by upper tier local authority of residence: 2016  Data source: GUMCAD
Figure 11: Map of new STI rates per 100,000 residents by upper tier local authority in the North West: 2016 Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD
Table 4: Number of diagnoses of new STIs by PHEC of residence, data source and data subset: 2016  Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHEC of residence</th>
<th>GUMCAD</th>
<th>CTAD*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialist SHCs</td>
<td>Non-specialist SHCs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>19,559</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>7,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>25,814</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>7,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>97,545</td>
<td>2,150</td>
<td>17,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>14,036</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>36,794</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>16,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>41,059</td>
<td>1,003</td>
<td>9,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>24,257</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>8,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>31,124</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>6,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humber</td>
<td>25,685</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>9,755</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Number of diagnoses of the 5 main STIs in the North West by STI, data source and data subset: 2016  Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 main STIs</th>
<th>GUMCAD</th>
<th>CTAD*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhoea</td>
<td>3,457</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>3,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>13,137</td>
<td>16,828</td>
<td>29,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Herpes</td>
<td>3,993</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>4,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Warts</td>
<td>7,772</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>8,086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* including site type 12 chlamydia from GUMCAD
Pilot of open-access full screening, Cumbria and Lancashire

Connect Integrated Young People service in Blackpool (under 25) is currently piloting the offer of an open-access full screen on completion of the registration form at the first attendance. If the patient is needle phobic, an INSTI test is used as part of the full screen process. If patient registration does not indicate a full screen, the patient is still offered a chlamydia test as part of the National Chlamydia Screening Programme.

The service has undertaken 1,577 tests and diagnosed 318 chlamydia, 29 gonorrhoea and one HIV positive, with a total positivity rate of 22% since the full screen pilot began at Connect. The service manager has also reported 3 syphilis diagnoses picked up on INSTI testing, which were not captured as Connect diagnoses in the dataset. A cost analysis needs to be undertaken to decide whether universal chlamydia/gonorrhoea testing or full screen is preferable and how INSTI testing is being recorded.
4 Information on data sources


4.1 GUMCAD surveillance system

This disaggregate reporting system collects information about attendances and diagnoses at specialist (Level 3) and non-specialist (Level 2) sexual health services. Information about the patient’s area of residence is collected along with demographic data and other variables. GUMCAD superseded the earlier KC60 system and can provide data from 2009 onwards. GUMCAD is the main source of data for this report. The data extract used was produced in April 2017.

Due to limits on how much personally identifiable information sexual health clinics are able to share, it is not possible to deduplicate between different clinics. There is a possibility that some patients may be counted more than once if they are diagnosed with the same infection (for infection specific analyses) or a new STI of any type (for new STI analyses) at different clinics during the same calendar year.

4.2 CTAD surveillance system

The CTAD surveillance system collects data on all NHS and LA/NHS-commissioned chlamydia testing carried out in England. CTAD is comprised of all chlamydia (NAATs) tests for all ages (with the exception of conjunctival samples), from all venues and for all reasons. CTAD enables unified, comprehensive reporting of all chlamydia data, to effectively monitor the impact of the NCSP through estimation of the coverage of population screening, proportion of all tests that are positive and detection rates. The data extract used was produced in February 2017.

4.3 New STIs

New STI diagnoses comprise diagnoses of the following:

- chancroid
- LGV
- donovanosis
- chlamydia
- gonorrhoea
- genital herpes (first episode)
- HIV (acute and AIDS defining)
- *molluscum contagiosum*, non-specific genital infection (NSGI)
- non-specific pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and epididymitis
- chlamydial PID and epididymitis (presented in chlamydia total)
- gonococcal PID & epididymitis (presented in gonorrhoea total)
- scabies
- pediculosis pubis
- syphilis (primary, secondary and early latent)
- trichomoniasis and genital warts (first episode)
- *mycoplasma genitalium*
- shigella

### 4.4 Calculations

Confidence Intervals were calculated using Byar’s method: [http://www.erpho.org.uk/statistical_tools.aspx](http://www.erpho.org.uk/statistical_tools.aspx).

ONS mid-year population estimates for 2015 were used as a denominator for rates for 2016. ONS ceased producing estimates of population by ethnicity in 2011. Estimates for that year were used as a denominator for rates for 2016.
5 Further information and acknowledgements

As of this year, all analyses for this report include data from non-specialist (Level 2) SHCs as well as specialist (Level 3) SHCs.

Please access the online ‘Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles’ for further information: http://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/sexualhealth


Local authorities have access to LA sexual health epidemiology reports (LASERs) and the HIV and STI portal. They should contact FES.NorthWest@phe.gov.uk if they do not have access to this information.

Please contact FES.NorthWest@phe.gov.uk for an Annual Epidemiological Spotlight on HIV in North West: 2015 data.

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Sexual Health Lead for the North West: Dianne Draper: Dianne.Draper@phe.gov.uk

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We would like to thank the following:

- local SHCs for supplying the SHC data.
- local laboratories for supplying the CTAD data
- PHE Centre for Infectious Disease Surveillance and Control (CIDSC) HIV and STI surveillance teams for collection, analysis and distribution of data.
6 About Field Epidemiology Services

The Field Epidemiology Service (FES) supports Public Health England centres and partner organisations through the application of epidemiological methods to inform public health action.

FES does this in two main ways, firstly by providing a flexible expert resource, available, as and when needed, to undertake epidemiological investigations for key health protection work and secondly through the expert analysis, interpretation and dissemination of surveillance information to PHE centres, local health partners, service providers and commissioners of services.

Within the FES network, excellence and innovation is encouraged, we foster academic collaborations and take active part and lead in research, development and training.

You can contact your local FES team at FES.NorthWest@phe.gov.uk

If you have any comments or feedback regarding this report or the FES service, please contact FES.NorthWest@phe.gov.uk