Spotlight on sexually transmitted infections in the South East
2016 data
About Public Health England

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Published August 2017
PHE publications gateway number: 201327

PHE supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals
## Contents

1 Summary 4
   Implications for prevention 5
   PHE’s key messages 7
2 Charts, tables and maps 8
3 Information on data sources 16
   3.1 GUMCAD surveillance system 16
   3.2 CTAD surveillance system 16
   3.3 New STIs 16
   3.4 Calculations 17
4 Further information 18
5 About Field Epidemiology Services 19
6 Acknowledgements 19
1 Summary

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) represent an important public health problem in particular areas and groups in the South East.

More than 51,600 new STIs were diagnosed in South East residents in 2016, representing a rate of 595 diagnoses per 100,000 population, which is the second lowest rate among Public Health England centres in England. Rates by upper tier local authority ranged from 385 new STI diagnoses per 100,000 population in West Berkshire to 1,390 new STI diagnoses per 100,000 population in Brighton and Hove.

The number of new STIs diagnosed in South East residents fell by 3% between 2015 and 2016. Falls were seen in the numbers of most of the five major STIs: gonorrhoea decreased by 18%, genital herpes by 2% and genital warts by 7%. Syphilis increased by 29% and chlamydia by 2%. The number of diagnoses of syphilis reported in 2016 was more than double that reported in 2012.

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. In 2016 the chlamydia diagnosis rate among South East residents aged 15 to 24 years was well below this, at 1,486 per 100,000 residents.

Men and women have similar rates of new STIs (613 and 570 per 100,000 residents respectively).

Where gender and sexual orientation are known, men who have sex with men (MSM) account for 12% of South East residents diagnosed with a new STI in a specialist sexual health clinic (SHC) (79% of those diagnosed with syphilis and 52% of those diagnosed with gonorrhoea). The number of new STIs in MSM in the South East fell by 11% between 2015 and 2016, with gonorrhoea diagnoses falling by 27%, however, syphilis diagnoses in MSM rose by 27%. There were two cases of high-level azithromycin resistant gonorrhoea reported in MSM in the South East in 2016.

STIs disproportionately affect young people. South East residents aged between 15 and 24 years accounted for 53% of all new STI diagnoses in 2016.

The white ethnic group has the highest number of new STI diagnoses: over 37,800 (88%). Although only 1% of new STIs were in black Caribbeans, they have the highest rate: 1,858 per 100,000, which was 4 times the rate seen in the white ethnic group.
Where country of birth was known, 85% of South East residents diagnosed in a specialist SHC in 2016 with a new STI were UK-born.

While the fall in gonorrhoea diagnoses is welcome, the rising numbers of syphilis diagnoses remains a concern.

This summary does not report on all infections which can be acquired sexually eg it does not include data on HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis A and *Shigella*. HIV data will be released in October 2017 and previous reports are available.\(^1\) Of particular note is the large UK and international outbreak of hepatitis A predominantly affecting MSM which began in 2016 and includes cases in the South East.\(^2\)\(^3\)

**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.

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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

Figure 2: Number of diagnoses of the five main STIs: South East residents, 2012-2016. 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.
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.

**Table 1: Percentage change in new STI diagnoses: South East 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>51,695</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>175%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhoea</td>
<td>3,005</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>-18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>23,774</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Herpes</td>
<td>4,532</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Warts</td>
<td>9,136</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see notes for Figure 3.
Figure 4: Rate of new STIs per 100,000 residents by age group in the South East, 2016. Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

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

Table 2: Proportion of South East 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>37,850</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other BME</td>
<td>3,450</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>8,679</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6: Proportions of South East residents diagnosed with a new STI by world region of birth: 2016. Data sources: GUMCAD data only

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

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: South East 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>4,978</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>190%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhoea</td>
<td>1,543</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>-27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>1,183</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Herpes</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Warts</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see notes for Figure 7.

Figure 8a: Rate of new STI diagnoses per 100,000 population among South East residents by upper tier local authority of residence: 2016. Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD
Spotlight on STIs in the South East

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 South East residents by upper tier local authority of residence: 2016. Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

![Graph showing the rate of new STI diagnoses (excluding chlamydia diagnoses in persons aged 15-24 years) per 100,000 population aged 15-64 years among South East 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 South East residents by upper tier local authority of residence: 2016. Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

![Graph showing the chlamydia detection rate per 100,000 population aged 15-24 years in South East residents by upper tier local authority of residence: 2016. Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD.]

13
Figure 10: Rate of gonorrhoea diagnoses per 100,000 population in South East 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 South East: 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>

* Including site type 12 chlamydia from GUMCAD

### Table 5: Number of diagnoses of the 5 main STIs in the South East 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></td>
<td>Specialist SHCs</td>
<td>Non-specialist SHCs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhoea</td>
<td>2,926</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>3,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>14,141</td>
<td>9,633</td>
<td>23,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Herpes</td>
<td>4,350</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>4,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Warts</td>
<td>8,790</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>9,136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Including site type 12 chlamydia from GUMCAD
3 Information on data sources

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


3.1 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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.

### 3.4 Calculations

Confidence Intervals were calculated using Byar’s method

ONS mid-year population estimates for 2015 were used as a denominator for rates for
that year were used as a denominator for rates for 2016.
4 Further information

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 josh.forde@phe.gov.uk if they do not have access to this information.

5 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.seal@phe.gov.uk

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

6 Acknowledgements

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