

Refugee Council

help and advice



May 2008

English

Sexual health – information factsheet

Age of consent

- The age of consent (agreement) for sex in the UK is age 16.
- This is the same for men and for women and includes heterosexual and homosexual partners.
- Both partners must be over the age of 16; if one person is under 16 it is illegal and could result in a prison sentence.
- There is no limit on the age gap between partners so long as they are both over 16.

Homosexuality

- Homosexuality is legal in the UK.
- It is against the law for you to be discriminated against because of your sexuality.
- The age of consent for both men and women in gay or lesbian relationships is age 16.

Sex and the law

- It is illegal for someone to force you to have sex or to take part in any kind of sexual act if you don't want to do so. This also applies if you are married to the person or in a relationship with them. These offences carry heavy prison sentences.
- It is against the law to harass or follow someone repeatedly. If you are concerned that you are being followed go to a public space and get help.
- It is illegal to have sex in a public space like a car or a park or anywhere you may be seen. It is illegal to add to someone's drink alcohol or drugs. If you are worried this may have happened or feel unwell go somewhere safe like a restaurant or somewhere public and call for help from the call.
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision, is against the law in the UK from any age.

Contraceptives

- There are many different types of contraception. These include male and female condoms, the contraceptive pill, contraceptive implants or injections, fitted devices such as a coil, natural methods like the rhythm method or permanent method such as vasectomy.
- For help in deciding what method of contraceptive to use speak to a general practitioner (GP) or nurse at your doctor's surgery or family planning clinic in confidence.
- All contraceptives are free by prescription from your doctor (GP), nurse or sexual health clinic.

Other leaflets are available at <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

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Condoms

- You can get free condoms from you local nurse or GP, family planning clinics or from a sexual health clinic. These services are confidential.
- You can buy condoms from supermarkets, local shops, petrol stations, pharmacists and from vending machines in public toilets.
- There are two types of condoms available – male condoms or female condoms. Make sure you read the information you get with the condom which shows you how to use them properly. They will not work properly unless they are fitted correctly.
- The contraceptive pill will stop a woman getting pregnant but not protect her from getting an infection – a condom will.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

- To protect yourself from getting a sexually transmitted infection you should wear condom. They prevent infection in both men and in women.
- You can get infected even if you have sex only once.
- You cannot tell by looking at someone if they have a sexually transmitted infection.
- STI's can become very serious if left untreated and can result in infertility.

HIV

- If you think you may be HIV positive then you need to speak to your GP for advice.
- You can also get information from independent, confidential organisations such s the Terence Higgins Trust. You can find information on their website at www.tht.org.uk which also has details of local services.
- Please don't be worried about contacting your doctor or independent organisations – they are non-judgmental and are there to help and assist you.

What to do if you are worried

- If you have unprotected sex then you should get tested at your GP's surgery or at a sexual health clinic. Both are confidential.
- You may not show any symptoms or feel unwell; however this doesn't mean that you have not been infected.
- Don't worry about going to the doctors – they prefer you to get checked. Don't worry that you are wasting their time.
- Earlier is better for successful treatment, so go as soon as you can.
- Do not get embarrassed.

If you think you are pregnant

- If you think you may be pregnant you can speak to your GP or a nurse confidentially at your local surgery. Alternatively you can contact your local sexual health clinic.
- Your GP or local sexual health clinic can give you information about your pregnancy.
- A GP or clinic can also advise you about unwanted pregnancies. Abortion is legal in the UK but it will always be your decision about whether to go ahead with it or not.

Where to go for help and advice

- You can contact your local GP surgery for confidential advice regarding sexual health including STIs or any worries you may have.

- You can also contact your local sexual health clinic; you will find details of how to contact them in the telephone book or at your local doctor's surgery or hospital.
- You can also contact NHS Direct either by phone on 0845 46 47, or on the internet at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- There are also independent organisations who can offer confidential support and advice such as the Family Planning Association (FPA). They can be contacted at their website www.fpa.org.uk or by phone on 0845 122 8690.
- Many GP surgeries run women only sessions – contact you local surgery for details.
- If you are worried about female genital mutilation (FGM) or female circumcision you can speak to your doctor or nurse; you can also speak to the police as it is against the law in the UK.
- You can contact www.harpweb.org.uk for specialist information about health care for asylum seekers and refugees. You can download leaflets in various languages on this website.

For general medical emergencies

For emergencies you can contact 999 for the police and ambulance service or you can go to your local hospitals accident and emergency department.