

Young people and sexual health



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Executive Summary

Healthwatch Blackpool have gained insight from young people to understand views and experiences of accessing local sexual health services. Through an online survey and subsequent focus group, Healthwatch Blackpool engaged with 142 young people, and the information collated has formulated the following key messages.

Key Messages and Recommendations:

- 40% of the young people we spoke to used sexual health services. Raising awareness of local sexual health services would be beneficial to increase access for young people. This could be done through outreach work within educational settings, incorporating local sexual health services into the sex education curriculum and informing educational professionals of the support available locally for young people.
- The most frequently accessed service was Connect.
- Contraception and combined contraception and sexual health screening were the most common reasons for young people visiting services.
- Young people rated their experience of accessing sexual health services as high.
- Young people who did access sexual health services noted a preference for weekends, afternoon appointments or appointments after educational hours. Extending opening times on Mondays and Wednesdays could help to accommodate for those visiting after school or college. In addition, extending opening times on Saturdays could increase accessibility for those young people who may struggle to visit midweek.
- Young people lacked awareness in relation to insight and understanding on sexual health information. 57% of young people were aware that sexual health services offer support for HIV and PrEP, however, 88% did not know that you can call 0300 1234 154 for emergency contraception. Incorporating this into outreach work within educational settings would allow young people to gain a greater understanding of what is available to them.
- Young people most commonly accessed condoms via the supermarket. Reasons for this included convenience and easy access. Within educational sessions, informing young people where condoms are available for free locally could help encourage safe sex and could offer a free alternative for those individual's buying from the supermarket.
- 51% of young people were unaware that postal STI kits are available to local residents free of charge. Raising awareness that postal STI kits are available to local residents would be extremely beneficial for young people.
- 32% of young people stated they would feel uncomfortable with a postal STI kit being sent to their home address. 39% of young people stated they would feel more comfortable collecting an STI kit from sexual health services to be completed at home. Piloting a provision within sexual health services whereby STI kits could be collected from local services would enable access for those individual's who may not currently feel comfortable utilising this service.
- Incorporating accurate information relating to gay and lesbian sex, self-esteem after intercourse, the risk of pregnancy and information relating to consent via outreach sessions or within sexual health education in school would be useful.
- Positive feedback relating to sexual health services focused largely on staff manner and attitude, followed by the advice and guidance received.
- Suggested areas for improvement focused on raising awareness of what sexual health services offer and how people can access them. In addition, increasing the accessibility and availability of local sexual health services was suggested, with the majority of responses being centred on opening times.

Introduction to Healthwatch Blackpool

Healthwatch was established in April 2013 as part of the implementation of the Health and Social Care Act (2012). Healthwatch Blackpool are the independent consumer voice for health and social care, listening to the views of local people with the aim to make services work for those who use them. We welcome local people's experiences of healthcare services to influence change and offer improvement.

Introduction to Streetlife

Streetlife is a charity that provides emergency shelter and support to vulnerable young people, aged 16-25, in Blackpool. Streetlife's night shelter is based next to St John's Church in Blackpool town centre and can accommodate up to eight young people. The Base is located on Buchanan Street, where young people can come along to the drop in sessions. Other support Streetlife offers include; tenancy support, one to one counselling, food parcels, toiletry parcels as well as general information and advice alongside one to one support.

Rationale

Healthwatch Blackpool and Streetlife recognised a need to give young people the opportunity to share their experiences of sexual health services. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that young people were unable to access sexual health services face-to-face. When engaging with 259 young people through a commissioned project in 2021, Healthwatch Blackpool found that a significant amount of young people would like sexual health to be prioritised locally. Anecdotal feedback when visiting colleges suggested that local sexual health opening and closing times do not work for young people, specifically accessibility outside of educational hours. In addition to this, we were informed by Public Health Blackpool that the number of young people accessing sexual health services has decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, attendee numbers have not reached the pre-COVID-19 levels as expected.

Our aim was to uncover and focus on the reasons for the decreased use of local sexual health services among young people. It was noted that issues such as opening times may play a role in why this could be, alongside other factors, such as the sexual health information provided within the school setting.

Through creating a survey and a subsequent focus group, the short and medium term outcomes we wished to achieve included understanding the reasons why young people are not accessing sexual health services or alternatives. We hoped to be able to describe what young people would see as an ideal service in terms of access, and understand the opening hours young people would find useful. We aimed to describe what young people value about the service and what they would like to keep. Public Health Blackpool are interested to hear young people's feedback. We are happy to work with Public Health to consider overcoming practical barriers that may exist within local sexual health services.

As a consequence of this work, long term outcomes may aim to see an increased number of young people accessing local sexual health services, and subsequently a reduction in the spread of STI's.

The wider impact of this work will aim to improve the health and wellbeing of young people, whilst reducing the demand on services that provide acute treatment at a later point.

Methodology

Design

Healthwatch Blackpool's Young Person's Engagement Officer attended meetings alongside Public Health Practitioner's, the Deputy Head of Service for sexual health and a sexual health Team Leader. Priorities for this project were explored through discussions. A project proposal highlighting the aim and desired outcome of the project was shared with the group and open to scrutiny.

Subsequently, a draft set of questions were produced by Healthwatch Blackpool and the Young Person's Lived Experience Worker from Streetlife. These were reviewed with the group alongside Youthwatch Blackpool volunteers. The insight gained from scrutinising the survey led to additional questions being added. The final survey consisted of eighteen questions relating to sexual health services, twelve questions focusing on insight and understanding of sexual health information, followed by six demographic questions.

Within the debrief page, participants were made aware of their right to withdraw and how to do so should they wish. An additional open text box was included for those individuals who wished to leave their contact details to provide further feedback.

Procedure

Between April and July 2022, Healthwatch Blackpool and Streetlife engaged with young people and asked them to complete the sexual health insight survey. We were invited to Blackpool Sixth Form College's FYI library facility and Health and Social care classes, Blackpool Youth Council, UR potential, Connect, William Lyons Hostel, South Shore fire station Prince's Trust programme, Blackpool Youth Pride and Streetlife's weekly drop-ins to give young people the opportunity to have their voice heard through completing the survey.

Alongside this, the survey was also distributed to other third sector organisations who regularly engage with young people. Organisations received the survey link via email alongside a promotional poster. The poster contained a QR code to enable young people to easily scan and access the survey using their mobile phones.

Finally, Youthwatch volunteers shared the survey amongst peers, as well as utilising social media to help reach other young people. Healthwatch Blackpool readily endorsed the survey on all social media platforms.

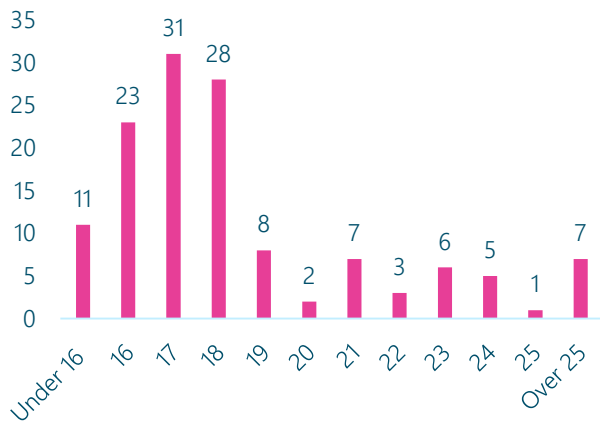
Healthwatch Blackpool and Streetlife would like to thank everyone who shared their views on local sexual health services. The feedback provided has been instrumental in formulating clear and focused recommendations that we can drive forward with Public Health Blackpool.

Methodology

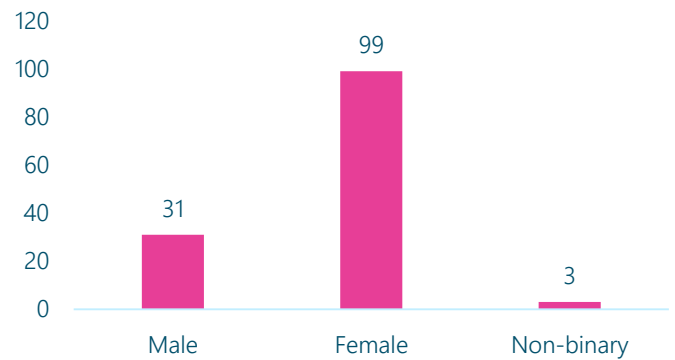
Participants and demographics

The survey was completed by 138 respondents currently residing on the Fylde Coast. It is important to consider the data contained within this report may not be representative of all young people's views within this area. The graphs below display the demographic information of those who took part.

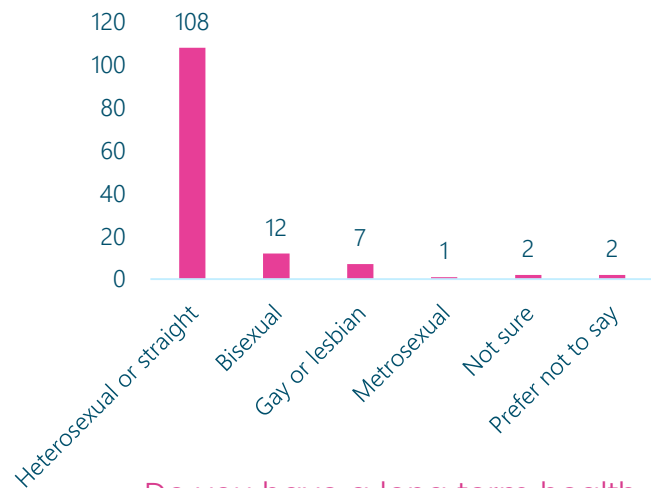
How old are you?



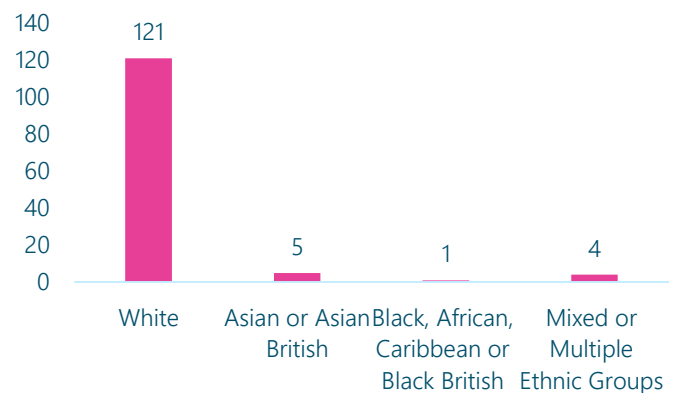
What gender do you identify as?



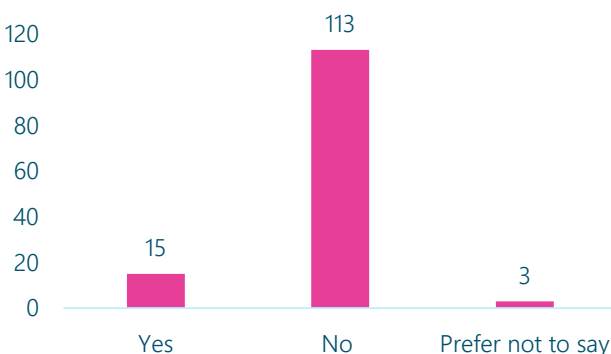
What is your sexual orientation?



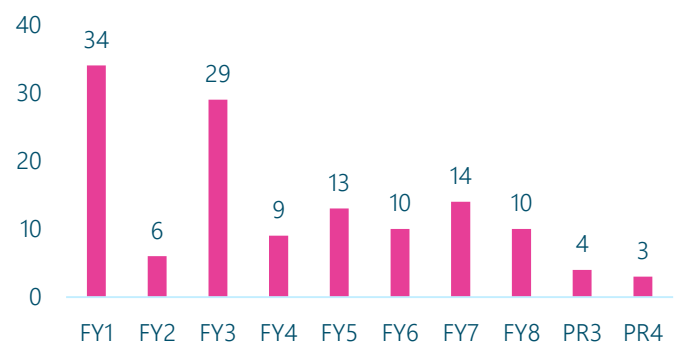
What is your ethnicity?



Do you have a long term health condition or disability?



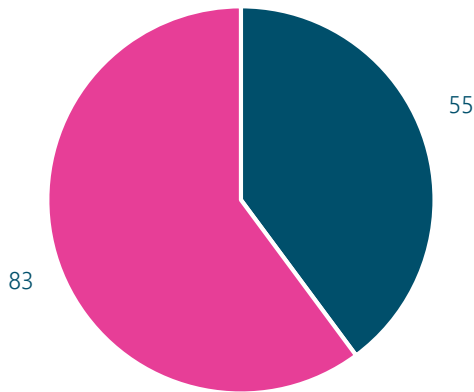
What is the first half of your postcode?



Survey insights

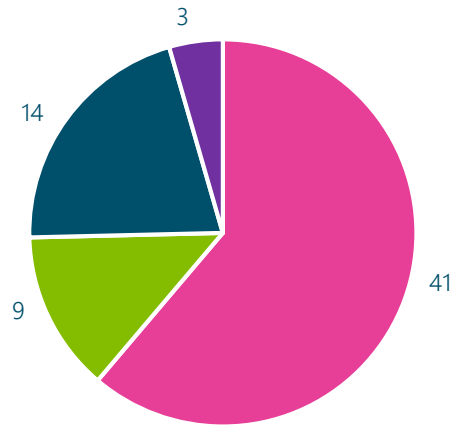
Sexual Health Service Feedback

Do you use Sexual Health Services?



■ Yes ■ No

Which service do you use?



■ Connect Blackpool ■ My GP ■ Whitegate Drive ■ Other

For those who answered 'other', 2 responses included outreach support referencing 'Suzanne Hodgson', and 1 person answered all of the above. For the 55 young people who answered 'Yes' to using sexual health services, the following questions were asked.

Do you know what Sexual Health Services offer? Please write what you believe this to be:

48 people highlighted the following key themes:

Contraception

33 young people suggested contraception, including the coil and the pill.

"I got my coil fitted there."

"They help with contraception."

"Free birth control."

"Contraceptive pill."

"To get checked out to get pills or implant not to get pregnant."

"Get the rod."

More specifically, 4 young people also suggested emergency contraception.

"Morning after pills."

"Emergency pill."

STI testing

26 young people suggested sexually transmitted infection testing.

"Free testing for any STDs until the age of 21?"

"STI/STD testing."

"Testing/screening for sexually transmitted diseases."

"Yes they can help with any STIs you may be concerned about."

"Free sexual health checkups."

Sexual Health Service Feedback

General advice

18 young people suggested advice and information, varying from sexual health advice to sex education.

"Advice and information."

"Offer advice on safe sex as well as support regarding sexual health."

"Sex education."

"Help with periods/sexual relationships."

"Sexual health advice."

Pregnancy tests

8 young people believed sexual health services offer pregnancy tests.

"Pregnancy tests."

Condoms

5 young people suggested condoms.

"Providing free protection for safe sex."

"Condoms."

"Protection."

Other

6 young people believe sexual health services offer the following.

"The smear."

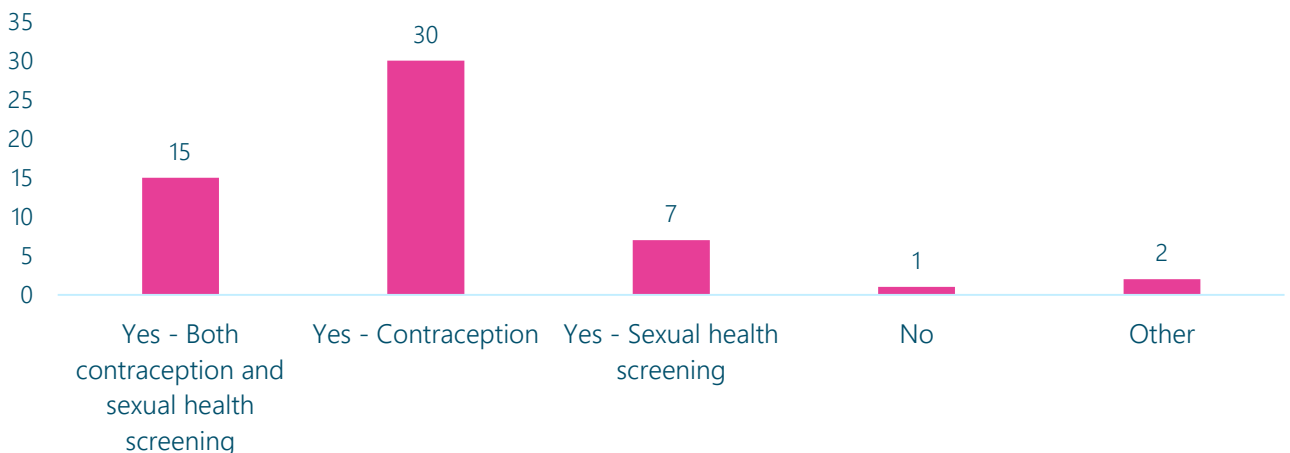
"Mental health."

"Youth therapy."

"HIV testing."

"Injections."

Have you used integrated Sexual Health Services for sexual health screening or contraception before?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included "not sure" and "morning after pill".

53 young people answered how they rate their experience of accessing sexual health services. On average, young people rated their experience as 4.26/5.

★★★★★
4.26 Average Rating

Sexual Health Service Feedback

Did you receive the support you intended to go for? Please specify:

The responses were broken down specifically to the different services, as follows.

Connect

30 young people stated they had received the support they intended to go for at Connect. This support varied, from receiving contraception to accepting advice.

"Yes, kind and caring."

"Yes I got my rod changed."

"Yes I did really helpful staff."

"Yes they provided great support."

"Yes, advice on contraception."

1 young person specifically noted that they had received the correct support, however *"the receptionist at Connect is so patronising it's so bad."*

Whitegate Drive

6 young people stated they had received the support they intended to go for at Whitegate Drive.

"Yes as I was quite nervous for the process."

"Yes, Whitegate drive staff are always so welcoming and provide advice free from bias."

1 young person made reference to the receptionist, noting *"yes full of information and advice however the receptionists just aren't that polite sometimes."*

GP

3 young people stated they had received the support they required via their GP.

"Yes, I went in for contraception and was given a full explanation on all my options so that I was able to choose the best option for me."

More than one service

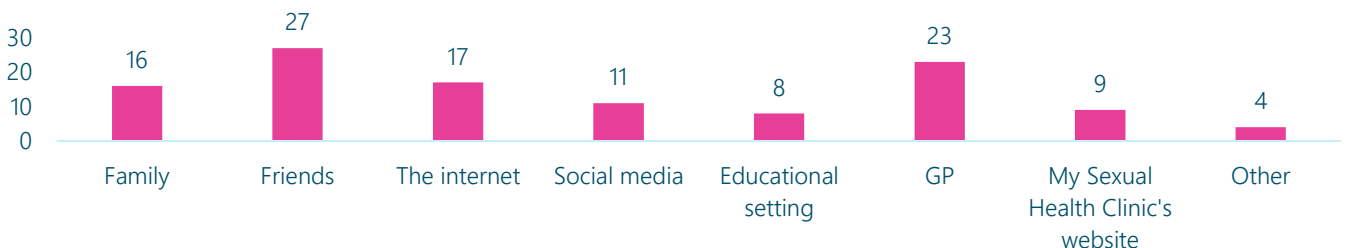
For those young people who accessed more than one sexual health service, 9 young people received the support they intended to go for.

"I use Whitegate drive for a copper coil and have used Connect for a sexual health screening and was supported well at both places."

Despite this, 1 person noted concerns regarding staff manner and experience.

"It is hit and miss, I feel as though it depends on the member of staff I get or what it is I'm attending for. If it's just for a simple STI test or to get condoms for example, then usually I receive the support required. However, when I first had a herpes flare up, the support I received was awful and actually quite traumatising."

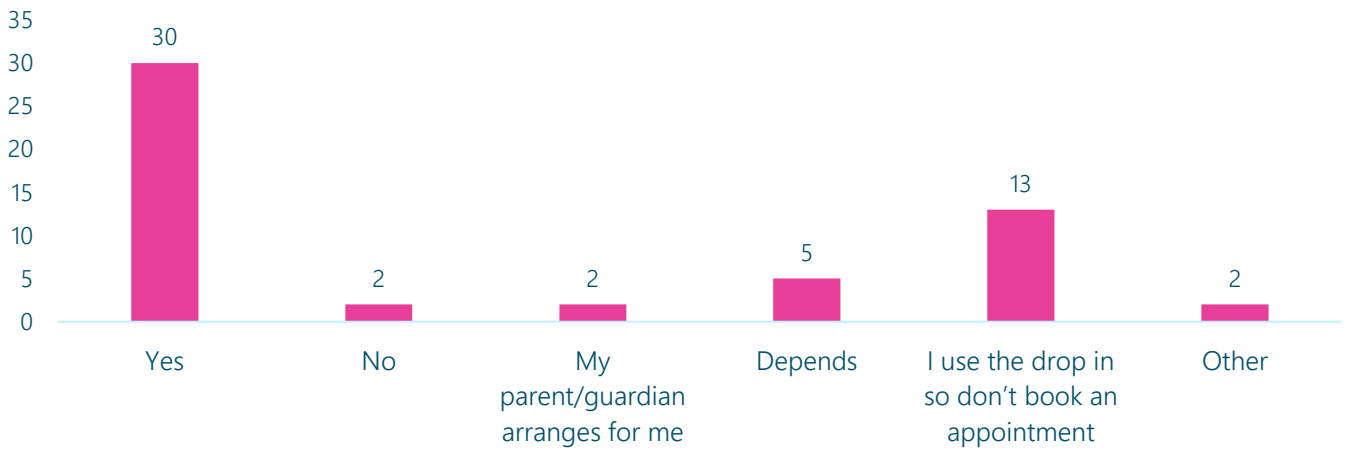
Where do you get information around sexual health services?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included "my hostel (William Lyons)", "shelter", "Streetlife" and "support worker".

Sexual Health Service Feedback

Is it easy to book appointments?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included "support worker books" and "the service comes to where I live".

If you selected no, depends, my parent/guardian books for me or other, please specify why this is:

2 participants struggle with knowing who to contact and where the services are.

"Sometimes it can be hard to get hold of the specific people or know where to ring or find the services."

"It's difficult to find out where to go and when."

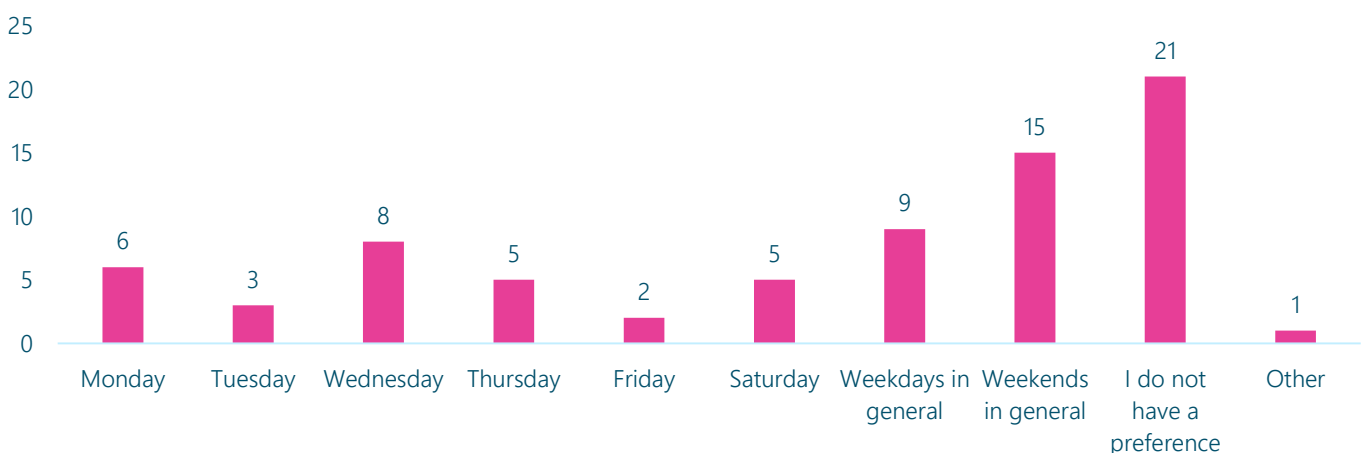
A further 2 people referenced time as a factor.

"Always busy."

"Sometimes late or forget."

Mental health and privacy also impacted upon the booking of appointments.

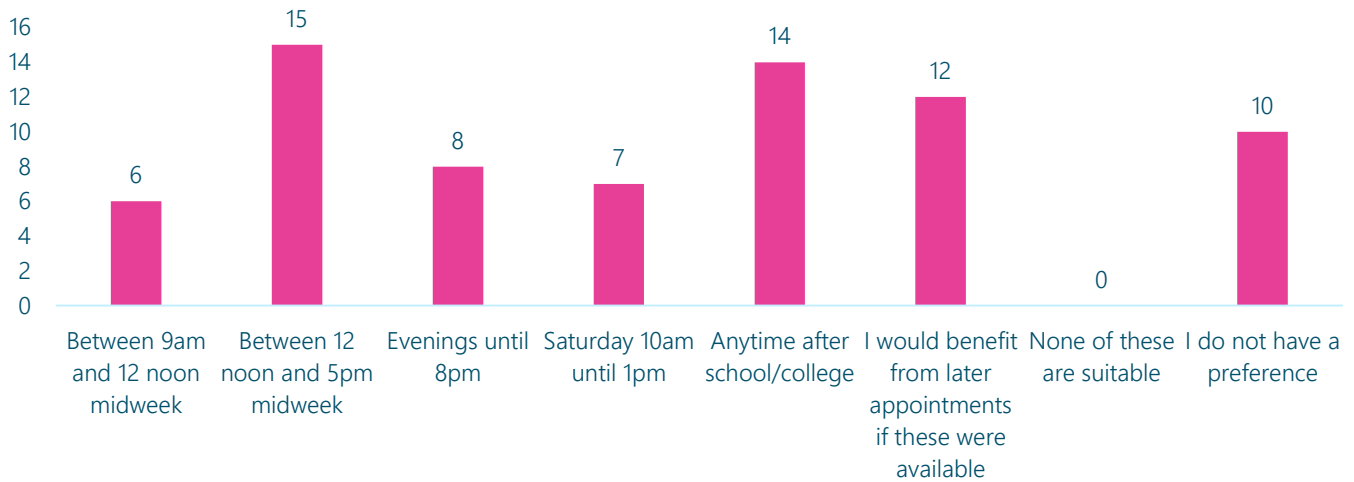
What day is the most convenient for you to access sexual health services?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included "depends on work".

Sexual Health Service Feedback

What time is the most convenient for you to access Sexual health services?



Have you had any difficulties with access? For example opening times, booking method etc:

Of the total 44 responses, 28 young people stated that they had experienced no difficulty accessing sexual health services.

Despite this, 7 participants acknowledged issues surrounding opening and closing times. Young people made reference to potentially providing later appointments and being unable to access services after school hours.

"I have found that appointment times are not late enough in the day and have had to leave work early to attend appointments."

"Opening and shutting times might be a little problem because on some days I'm in college until 4pm and the service shuts at 5 and by the time I will get there it might be difficult to get a proper visit."

"Openings times are difficult as they're often not when I'm available and the drop ins are so short."

"When I was at school and college, I remember it being difficult to make it in time as I am from Fleetwood and was trying to get to connect on the bus. Now that I drive and work full time, it is much easier to access Whitegate Drive instead as I can park there, and weekends or evenings would be preferable as I work Monday-Friday 9-5."

"Yes, sometimes it's hard to access the service after college due to the opening times not being till late."

More specifically, 3 young people suggested difficulties with services closing on Sundays.

"Sunday opening times cos I work Saturdays."

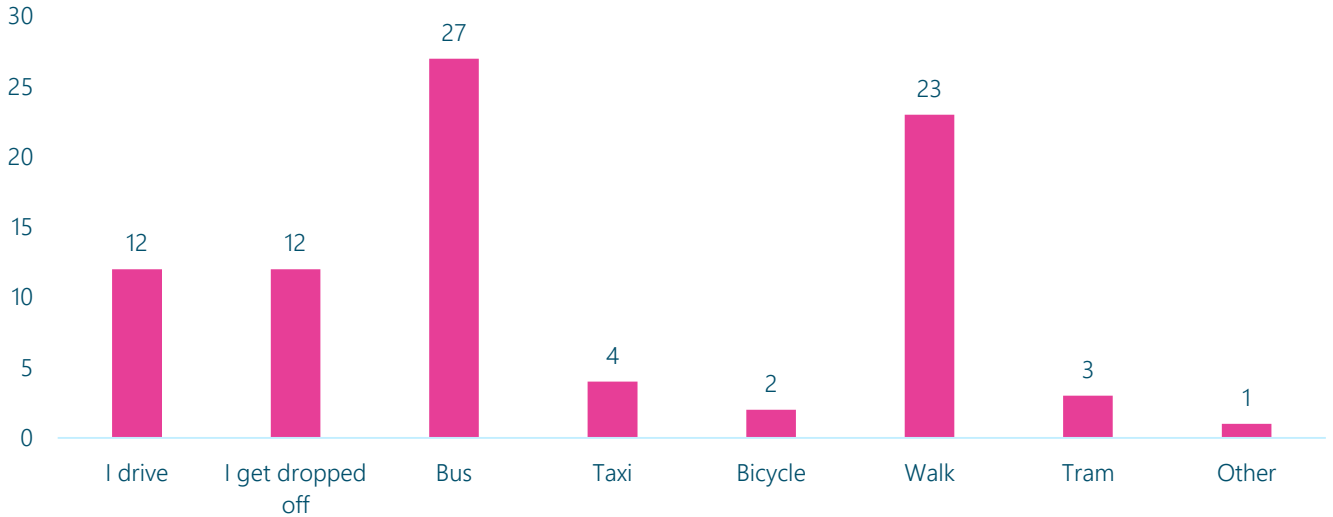
3 young people suggested difficulties with access as a consequence of staff lunch breaks and shortages.

"Connect Blackpool shuts for an hour mid-day so it's hard to get appointments. Wanted the contraceptive implant and was told if I go any later than 10:30 on a Saturday I won't be seen because they want to have their lunch and shut for an hour."

"Yes, sometimes they may have to send you away to come back. Sometimes if the staff have gone home or have ran out etc."

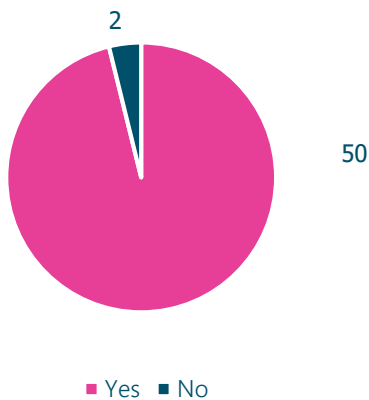
Sexual Health Service Feedback

How do you travel to Sexual Health Services?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included "train".

Is the location of Sexual Health Services easy to find?



If you selected no or other, please provide more information (what could make sexual health services easier to find):

"Depends if the individual is aware of the service to look."

"More information on the internet. They're also really hard to get to — my closest is Whitegate drive but I live ages away and I don't drive and the buses take forever."

Sexual Health Service Feedback

Are you comfortable with your name being called in the waiting room for an appointment? Please provide the reason for your answer and/or any alternative suggestions:

Of the 52 responses, 43 young people are comfortable with their name being called within the waiting room in sexual health services.

"For me it is not something to be ashamed of, if I'm worried about something and just being cautious or even if I had a problem its nothing special because it could happen to anyone and it shouldn't be shameful."

6 participants stated that they were not comfortable with this, with an additional 4 people highlighting concerns relating to confidentiality.

"It doesn't offer confidentiality. People already know what you are here for."

"There may be someone I know in there."

"Some people may of heard of someone's name and gossip the fact that they had known they was there."

"I think it is quite uncomfortable to have your name called. There is some stigma around sexual health issues and it sometimes can be embarrassing. This was more of an issue for me as a teenager and I can imagine it would be embarrassing for younger girls who do not feel confident accessing sexual health services and want to do so anonymously. This may deter them from receiving the support that they need."

2 participants suggested a number based calling system to be implemented.

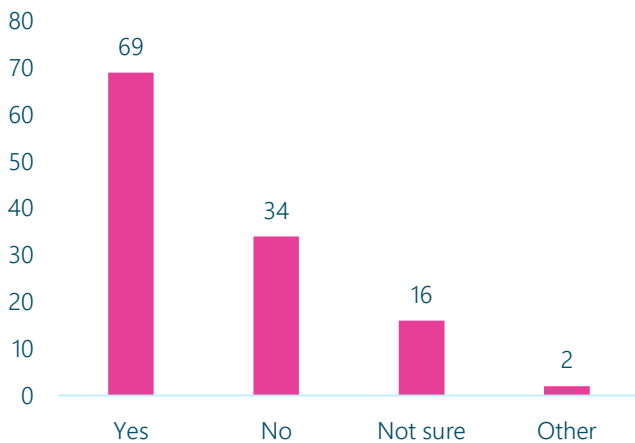
"I would much prefer to be given a number on arrival and this number be called out."

"Or you could get a number of the order people arrive for appointments."

Insight and Understanding On Sexual Health Information

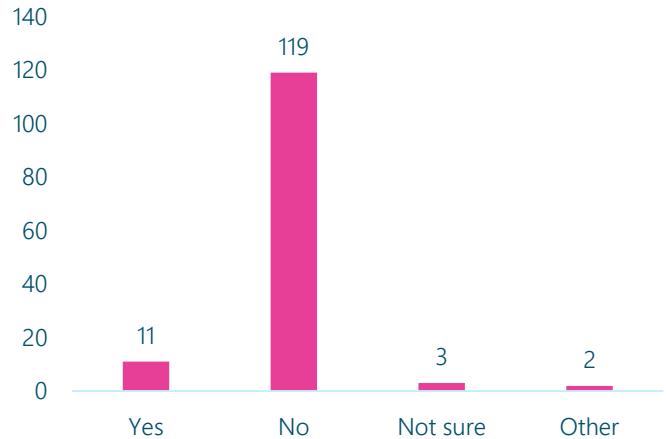
The following questions relating to sexual health information were answered by all 138 respondents, regardless whether or not they have accessed local sexual health services.

Did you know sexual health services offer support for HIV and PrEP?



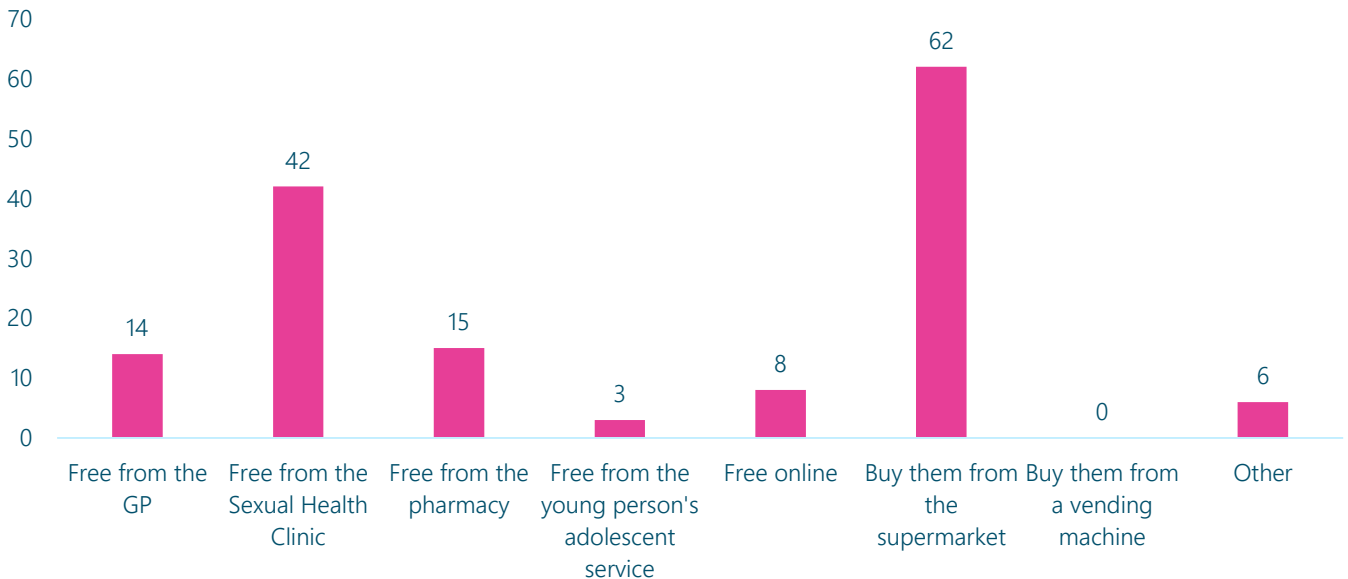
For those who answered 'Other', responses included "I was aware they test for HIV but that's it" and "I know about HIV but not PrEP."

Did you know you can call 0300 1234 154 for emergency contraception?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included "No because I have never looked for it or needed it" and "I don't need."

If you needed condoms, where would you most likely get them from?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included "ask my mum to buy me them", "I don't know", "I'm a lesbian", "never bought before", "support" and "wouldn't."

Insight and Understanding On Sexual Health Information

If you answered 'Buy them from a supermarket or vending machine', please specify why this is:

The following themes were noted as to why individuals opt to buy condoms from a supermarket.

Easier to access

30 young people stated that buying condoms from a supermarket was easier to access and more convenient.

"Feels easier."

"Just easier to buy them from a shop."

"More convenient as you can get them whilst you do your shopping."

"More likely to be in a supermarket."

Eases feelings of embarrassment or anxiousness

8 young people felt less anxious and embarrassed buying condoms from the supermarket.

"Less embarrassing when paying for them in self check out."

"I'd be too embarrassed to go to a sexual health clinic."

Rather go there to get them, would make me less anxious."

Unaware condoms are available for free

9 young people were unaware condoms were available for free.

"I am not sure if condoms would be free or not."

"Wasn't aware you could get them free above a certain age."

"I didn't know that you can get them free."

Unsure of where else to get them from

5 young people were unaware of other available locations where they could obtain condoms.

"Not sure where else to get them from."

"Because I didn't know the other ones were an option."

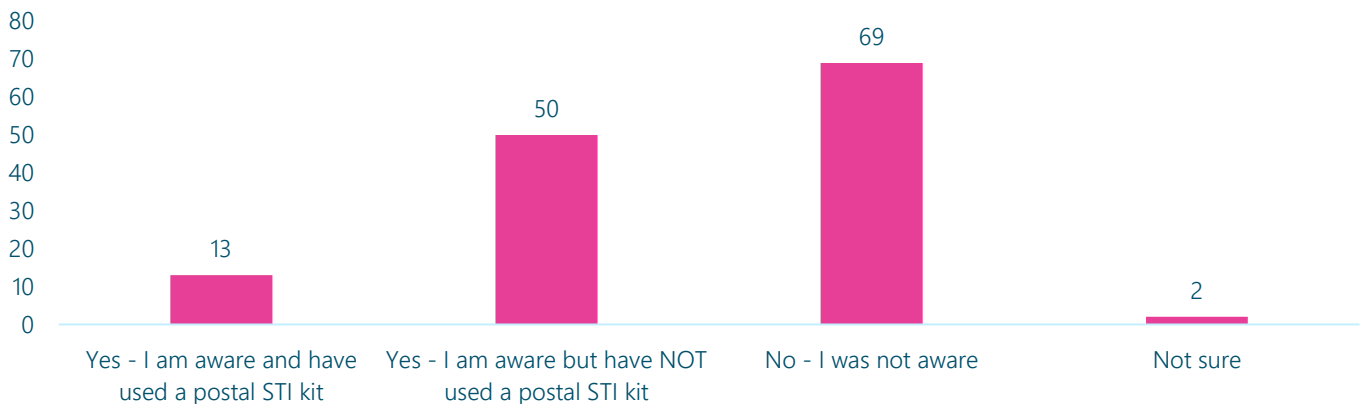
Condom quality

2 young people referenced condom quality as a reason why they opt to buy from a supermarket.

"Trusted brands."

"If sexual health clinic was closed or for a specific quality condoms."

Are you aware that postal STI kits are available to local residents free of charge?



Insight and Understanding On Sexual Health Information

For those young people who answered 'Yes - I am aware and have used a postal STI kit', an additional two questions was asked:

If you answered 'Yes – I am aware and have used a postal STI kit', did you experience any problems using the kit? If yes, please provide more details:

6 young people stated they had not experienced any problems and found the kit straightforward to use.

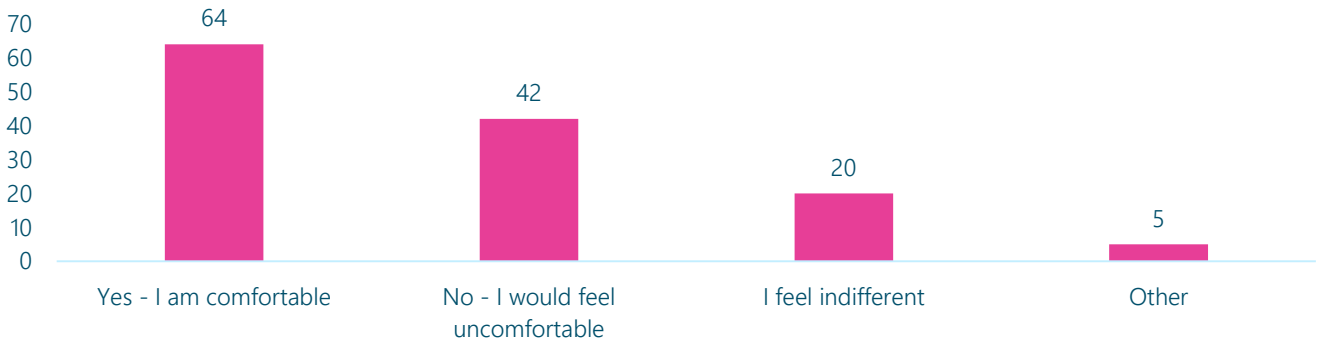
1 young person made reference to difficulty taking their own bloods, stating *"I couldn't get enough blood out - so more lances would be great. But it was fine other than that"*.

2 young people found the kit difficult to use, stating *"Yes, anal swabs and vectors rejecting my swabs."*

Were you made aware of your test results after using the postal STI kit?

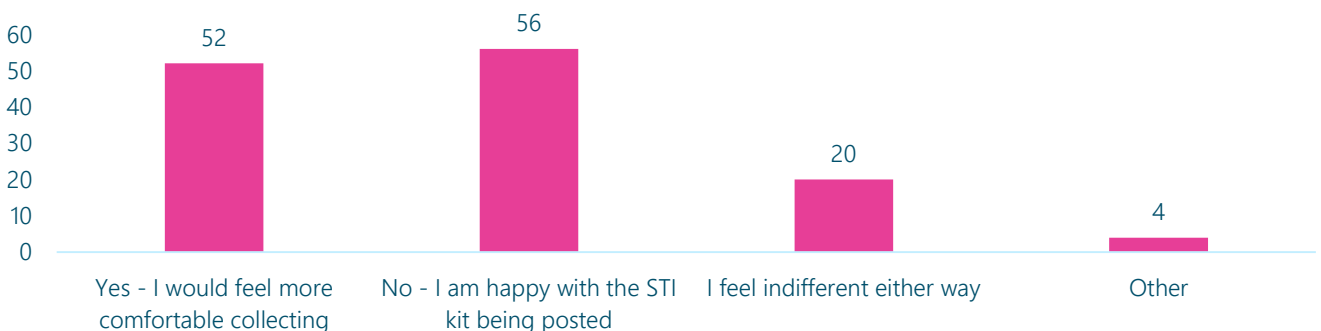
11 young people were made aware of their test results, and 1 young person answered 'not sure'.

Are you comfortable with a postal STI kit being sent to your home address?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included *"I feel comfortable as I know live in my own home, but I wouldn't have felt comfortable if I was still living at my parents house"*, *"I got it sent to my friends address"* and 3 young people stated they did not know.

Would you prefer to collect the STI kit from Sexual Health Services to complete at home?



For those who answered 'Other', responses included *"I would want to do it in the clinic"* and 3 young people stated they did not know.

Insight and Understanding On Sexual Health Information

What is positive about Sexual Health Services? (Please consider staff manner, environment, punctuality):

Of the 97 responses, the following themes were noted.

Staff manner and attitude

40 references were made regarding the positive nature of staff manner and attitude.

"The nurses are nice."

"They are very helpful and don't make you feel ashamed."

"Staff always make you feel comfortable and safe."

"When staff are friendly, it makes you want to go."

"The staff definitely, after being raped the staff rushed tests and did extra to make sure I was okay couldn't thank them enough."

"Everyone was nice and welcoming."

"Judgement free, compassionate staff."

"They are so caring about your situations and make sure you are comfortable either way."

"Staff making people feel welcome and not embarrassed to be there/use their services."

Advice and guidance

22 references were made regarding sound advice and support.

"They offer impartial advice and guidance."

"Providing knowledge."

"Gives good advice."

"Can advise young children and people so they are not afraid of any sexual health concerns they may have as the team."

"Giving good advice when you need it and it helps stop feeling embarrassed."

"Full of information to help you make an informed decisions."

"Education, support, help."

"Spread awareness."

Accessibility and environment

13 positive references were made with regards to the accessibility of the services and also the environment within sexual health services.

"Pretty quiet."

"People can access it and have a feeling of safety."

"I think connect is really accessible and you are seen quickly."

"Comfortable environment."

"The environment at both Whitegate drive and connect is fine."

"Easy accessible."

Confidential

4 references were made regarding confidentiality.

"Privacy, convenient."

"Confidentiality."

Efficiency

2 participants have noted the speed of sexual health services on the Fylde Coast.

"Quick and efficient."

"Fast."

Insight and Understanding On Sexual Health Information

Education

7 comments highlighted the benefit of the service for educating people and spreading awareness.

"Learning and testing yourself and help you to have safe sex."

"Helps people with their sexual health."

"Spread awareness."

"Prevent spread of diseases and infections as well as make people aware of the issues and preventions."

"The help they provide to people who are unsure about things."

"Help for those vulnerable, like youths."

"Safe space for people who need help who are unsure of anything."

Postal and discrete services

The option for postal and discrete services was deemed a positive aspect of the service by 3 participants.

"Free, easy discrete packaging and can be completed in the comfort of your own home. They also use sustainable packing and come quickly in around 1-2 weeks."

"Discrete delivery of STI testing kits."

"I have anxiety so I am happy using the postal service as it means I don't have to visit physically. I would use the drop in at my supported accommodation."

Insight and Understanding On Sexual Health Information

Can you think of any ideas for improving Sexual Health Services locally?

Of the 88 responses, 34 participants stated that there were no ideas for improvements of local sexual health services, or they were unsure.

Raise awareness

The most frequent suggestion to improve sexual health services locally was to raise awareness of what they offer and how people can access them, with 24 respondents putting forward this idea.

"Having young people at the age around 12-18 having the awareness of this and know what to do in situations concerning sexual health and how people can help others with sexual health."

"Maybe provide more information on how to get support and where to go for certain things."

"Promote a little more on social media, nowadays, people use social media a lot more and like me, I was very unaware of most of the questions e.g, condoms are free when I thought you had to pay."

"Promote the services offered better, because unfortunately there are a lot of things that people don't know about."

"I am currently unaware of any sexual health services available in Fleetwood and Thornton area. Maybe there could be greater promotion of these services through going into high schools."

Increasing accessibility and availability

Another suggested improvement, with 20 participants referencing this, was increasing the accessibility and availability of local sexual health services, with the majority of responses being centred on opening times. However, some alternative recommendations included outreach services and adapting communication methods, to make the service as inclusive as possible.

"Having opening times on Sundays."

"Maybe have a chat service if people are too embarrassed to ring or go into a service."

"Would be nice if there were services available nearer to me."

"Longer times from opening and closing for people who work late and need to travel a lot."

"Buzz bus (sexual health bus) at colleges/sixth forms."

"Online booking appointments."

Staff

9 people proposed changes to staff, particularly staff manner, experience or approachability.

"Ensure that staff are friendly and willing to help."

"If worried someone to talk you through what's going on."

"Employ staff with lived experience of every STI, including if possible HIV, herpes etc. as I find there is a lack of understanding around the impact this can have on someone's life, and you can almost tell in some cases that they have never been through it themselves."

"Better communication, staff being more approachable."

"Teach the receptionist's that a smile would go a long way."

Education

4 participants believe an improvement in education on sexual health is required.

"Further sexual health education for young people on consent, using things such as toys and cleaning them (Safely)."

"Talking to young people about using protection and don't do it under the age."

Other

"Better condom quality", "Sending a text as a reminder of when you need contraception changing."

Insight and Understanding On Sexual Health Information

How do you think Sexual Health Services can be prioritised for young people?

Of the 75 responses, 13 participants stated that they were unsure how sexual health services could be prioritised for young people, and 3 young people already believed they were prioritised. The following themes were noted from the remaining responses.

Improved education

The most frequent suggestion was educating young people about local sexual health services, with 14 respondents highlighting a preference for this to be within the education system.

"Going and doing talks in schools."

"Teach it to them in younger years in high school so they're informed from an early age."

"Coming into colleges and ensuring they are aware of services through things such as posters."

"Get into schools, colleges, big employers locally etc. to try and inform as many young people as possible about the importance of sexual health and what's available to them. Show that there is flexibility in meeting young peoples needs. What I mean by this is being open during hours that young people can't even attend sends a message of them not being a priority and a lack of willingness to adapt."

"Services should go into schools and do talks about sexual health and where to find support. I think these issues should be normalised amongst young people to reduce the stigma and allow people to have open conversations about their experiences, maybe through social media campaigns."

3 responses made reference to educating young people through giving information, with 1 person noting outreach services.

"More information given to young people about sexual health services so they feel more comfortable going if it's spoken about."

"Do more workshops"

"Lots of education, the bus going around, easily accessible and findable info on the internet."

Raise awareness

11 respondents proposed sexual health services could be prioritised by raising awareness of local services.

"Make young people aware."

"Make it more known, my brother is 17 and didn't even know where to get condoms."

"Being spoken about more often."

"More advertisement."

"Young people are more sexually active so they need more advice and support."

Increasing accessibility

Increasing the accessibility of local sexual health services was suggested by 9 young people, with the responses noting the need to adapt communication methods with a selection of appointments.

"Have a specific time slot."

"Have an online system."

"Try making it easier for younger people to come into health clinics."

"More of them."

"Better appointments when needed."

Insight and Understanding On Sexual Health Information

Non-judgemental attitude

5 young people suggested staff maintaining an impartial attitude would help prioritise sexual health services.

"Making them feel like they can go without being judged or looked over as something they shouldn't have done."

"To make them not feel embarrassed to go see the service."

"Avoid judgment of age unless it's concerning."

Other

Other responses included:

"Allow the information to be age related depending on the age range of the individuals who are being educated."

"Create a section for younger people."

"Offer screening services for young people as an event so they don't feel singled out when making an appointment."

"They can help as you can choose to tell your parents or not."

"Comfier chairs."

"Making tests the norm."

"I suppose it can be quite embarrassing for young people to use the services, particularly under age, so maybe have different services for people under a certain age (although I'm guessing something like this already exists.)"

Any other comments?

Of the 36 young people who answered this question, 31 young people stated they had no other comments to give. However, 4 young people made the following observations.

"Connect Blackpool reception lady bad."

"The receptionist was quite rude and made me very sad."

"GPs didn't help at all when going to them or checked up with a phone call."

"Wokeness is a cancer in the NHS and in society."

Focus group

Sexual Health Focus Group

Girls' Friendly Society (GFS)

Healthwatch Blackpool conducted a focus group with 4 young people, aged 14-18 years of age, from the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS). The GFS is a charitable organisation that empowers girls to develop their full potential through programs that provide training, confidence building, and other educational opportunities.



**FOR GIRLS
FOR FRIENDSHIP
FOR SOCIETY**

The aim was to gain a greater insight into the key themes raised within the survey through informal conversations. This focus group highlighted the following:

Sex education in schools

3 members of the focus group noted that they are not informed about local sexual health services within a school setting, or where to go for support. 1 individual stated *"they just say talk to someone in school about it but there is no one in school you can speak to."*

More specifically, 2 young people were not aware of Connect when prompted, and 1 young person stated that they know its location but are *"not sure what it's for."*

When the group were asked 'What is missing from sexual health education?', the following suggestions were made.

- Information regarding self-esteem after sex
- Information regarding the risk of pregnancy
- Information regarding consent
- Lack of interactive learning – *"The teachers just go through a slideshow and just show videos about STI's."*

Gay and lesbian sex

2 members of the group noted that sex education within a school setting is largely focused on heterosexual couples. These individuals expressed a strong need for gay sex to be incorporated within the curriculum, to help increase awareness and reduce stigma.

Postal STI kits

All 4 members of the group were unaware of postal STI kits. Only 1 individual stated they were comfortable with having the STI kit delivered to home.

Other areas for improvement

The group were in a joint consensus for the desire to have external services visit educational settings to inform them about sexual health. It was noted teachers can often appear uncomfortable and uneasy during sex education classes.

Additionally, 2 young people noted they would like an option to 'opt out' of sex education classes if they feel uncomfortable.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions from survey insights

In conclusion, less than half of respondents who completed the survey accessed local sexual health services. Moving forward, raising awareness of these would be beneficial in order to increase the number of young people accessing services.

The majority of young people who did access sexual health services had a good understanding of what is offered and received the support they intended to go for. The most common reason for visiting sexual health services was for contraception, followed by both contraception and sexual health screening. Those who had accessed services rated their experience as high. Young people are largely reliant on their friends, the GP and their family for information around sexual health services.

When booking appointments, young people found these easy to access and the majority did not have a preference regarding the day that was most convenient for them to attend. When asked what time was most convenient for young people to access sexual health services, respondents had a preference for 12 noon until 5pm midweek, or anytime after school/college. The majority of young people stated that they had experienced no difficulty accessing sexual health services. For those who did, issues surrounding opening and closing times were consistently noted, alongside difficulties with services closing on Sundays.

The majority of young people travelled to sexual health services via bus or attended on foot. Almost all young people found the location of services easy to find. When asked whether young people were comfortable with their name being called in the waiting room, the majority of young people felt comfortable. For the minority who did not, issues surrounding confidentiality were raised. A number calling system being implemented was suggested as an alternative.

On the whole, young people lacked awareness in relation to insight and understanding on sexual health information. The majority of young people did know sexual health services offer support for HIV and PrEP, however a large number of respondents did not know that you can call 0300 1234 154 for emergency contraception. The majority of young people stated they would most likely buy their condoms from the supermarket. When asked why, young people consistently felt they were easier to access and they found it more convenient.

More than half of the respondents were unaware that postal STI kits are available to local residents free of charge. For those young people who were aware, the majority of young people did not experience any problems using the kit, and all young people were made aware of their test results. Just over half of young people felt comfortable with a postal STI kit being sent to their home address, with a large proportion noting they would feel uncomfortable. When asked whether young people would prefer to collect the STI kit from sexual health services to complete at home, responses were mixed, with just under half of the respondents answering yes, and the other half stating they were comfortable with this being posted. Some young people felt indifferent either way.

Positive feedback relating to sexual health services focused largely on staff manner and attitude, followed by the advice and guidance received. Suggested areas for improvement focused on raising awareness of what sexual health services offer and how people can access them. In addition, increasing the accessibility and availability of local sexual health services was suggested, with the majority of responses being centred on opening times.

Conclusions from focus group insights

After conducting a focus group with the Girl's Friendly Society, a lack of awareness regarding local sexual health services within a school setting became apparent. Individuals were not informed of local services available to them whilst attending secondary school or where to go for support.

Young people felt that information relating to self-esteem after intercourse, the risk of pregnancy and information relating to consent was all missing from sexual health education at school. In addition, individual's expressed a need for the curriculum to incorporate gay and lesbian sex. Young people noted an interest for interactive learning as opposed to watching a slideshow.

All members of the focus group lacked awareness surrounding postal STI kits.

The group expressed a strong desire for external services to visit educational settings to inform them their sexual health and local services available to them.

Recommendations

Looking forward, it is clear that raising awareness of local sexual health services would be extremely beneficial to young people and would help to increase access into services. Those young people who did access sexual health services received the support they intended to go for, however, only a small proportion of young people are aware of local services to benefit from this support. Increasing awareness could be achieved via outreach work within educational settings, incorporating local sexual health services into the sex education curriculum, increasing social media presence and informing educational professionals of the support available locally for young people.

Those young people who did access sexual health services noted a preference for weekends, afternoon appointments or appointments after educational hours. Extending opening times on Mondays and Wednesdays days could help to accommodate for those young people visiting after school or college. Additionally, extending opening times on Saturdays could increase accessibility for those young people who may struggle to visit midweek. Furthermore, a number calling system could be implemented for those young people who do not feel comfortable with their name being called in the waiting room. This could be offered as an optional alternative for those young people feeling uncomfortable and wishing to maintain confidentiality.

In addition to this, raising awareness in relation to young people's insight and understanding on sexual health information would be extremely beneficial. Incorporating this into outreach work within educational settings would allow young people to gain a greater understanding of what is available to them, for example, access to emergency contraception via the telephone. Within these sessions, informing young people where condoms are available for free locally could help encourage safe sex and could offer a free alternative for those individual's buying from the supermarket.

Raising awareness that postal STI kits are available to local residents free of charge would be extremely beneficial for young people. This again could be done via outreach sessions, incorporated within the curriculum or alternatively through promotional material on social media. As a large proportion of young people noted they would feel uncomfortable with a postal STI kit being sent to their home address, and half of respondents stating a preference for collecting STI kits to complete at home, piloting this provision within sexual health services would enable access for those individual's who may not currently feel comfortable utilising this service.

Incorporating accurate information relating to gay and lesbian sex, self-esteem after intercourse, the risk of pregnancy and information relating to consent via outreach sessions or within sexual health education in secondary school would be useful. This could help to reduce stigma and encourage young people to talk openly about their thoughts and feelings from a young age.

Finally, although the feedback was largely positive relating to staff working within local sexual health services, there appears to be some inconsistencies, with some people feeling judged. Ensuring young people receive the same standard of service from all staff, including health care professionals and receptionists, is important to increase access rates and encourage young people to return.

Stakeholder response

"This is really welcome and timely! As you are aware, we are currently in the process of refreshing the Sexual Health Strategy, and from this, an action plan will follow. Young people's insight is hugely valuable to this process. There are some really interesting findings and comments. We greatly appreciate all your efforts and support in carrying out this survey."

Janet Duckworth, Public Health Practitioner, Blackpool.

Further information

If you would like further support and information regarding anything discussed in this report, please see the following:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault/>

<https://lancashiresexualhealth.nhs.uk/>

<https://lancashiresexualhealth.nhs.uk/testing-options/>