



Initiating conversations with under-25-year-olds to promote chlamydia screening

– tips for screening providers



Initiating conversations with young people

The National Chlamydia Screening Programme (NCSP) and the Department of Health¹ recently undertook research with young people, who said that how they are offered a test for chlamydia is important.

Health professionals can help young people to make an informed choice by communicating that the test is relevant to them and that testing is a normal part of staying healthy and not a comment on their lifestyle choices.

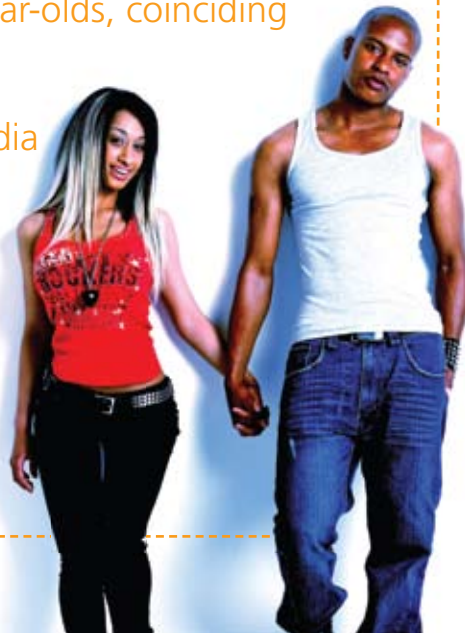
The facts

Genital chlamydial infection is most common in men and women under 25 years of age.

For women, the risk of chlamydia infection increases rapidly to peak in 17 to 20-year-olds, coinciding with early sexual experience.²

For men, the risk of chlamydia infection increases rapidly to age 19 and then subsequently plateaus.²

The NCSP advises that all sexually active under-25s should be routinely offered an annual chlamydia test.



Top tips

from young people on initiating conversations around the offer of a chlamydia test are:

"Use the word test, not screen."

"When offering us a test, establish the offer as a normal thing to do – we'd like to know that... all young people should have a chlamydia test at least once a year and with every new partner."

These key messages help us to understand why we need to get tested:

CHLAMYDIA IS INVISIBLE

The lack of symptoms increases our concern and helps explain the need for testing.

CHLAMYDIA IS SERIOUS

But this only becomes real to us when we know that chlamydia is invisible and easily spread.

CHLAMYDIA IS EASILY SPREAD

A very powerful message that makes us think about the risk to us.

"Tell us that we do not have to 'be inspected' and that the test is easy to do ourselves!"

"Use other opportunities to offer us a test, like when we are collecting a prescription or visiting the GP for other health reasons."

Key messages for men

In the research, young men especially held the assumption that the test will involve an umbrella device or painful swab. Fear of an invasive procedure is a barrier to getting the test and to finding out more.

A top tip from young men is:

"Ensure that you tell us clearly and simply that testing is painless (simply a pee in a pot), it's free, easy to do and easy to treat!"

Confidentiality

Young people also told us that confidentiality is critical to communicate at the first contact:

"Confidentiality allows us to feel in control and reduces our fears that our friends might find out somehow!"

Establish rapport

Another important factor is that staff offering the test should make the young person feel welcome, responsible for choosing a test and not judged, while offering the test using non-medical language:

"They made me feel normal, responsible, and secure for having tested."

The Health Protection Agency³ advises that all those interested in the sexual health of sexually active young people should use their particular communication skills to relay the following key messages for the prevention of sexually transmitted infections:

- **Have fewer sexual partners** and avoid overlapping sexual relationships.
- **Use a condom** when having sex with a new partner and continue to do so until you have both been tested.
- **Get tested** for chlamydia every year and whenever you have a new partner.

Useful resources

Use the chlamydia testing request card with your patients; make them available in places where young people can easily but discreetly pick them up, or facilitate this by asking reception staff to hand them out to young people under 25.

For further support or training, please contact your local chlamydia screening office, details of which can be found at www.chlamydia-screening.nhs.uk



References

- 1 'Chlamydia Screening and Sexual Health Marketing – Young People, 2008', Define Research and Insight Ltd for the Department of Health and the National Chlamydia Screening Programme (unpublished).
- 2 Simms I, Talebi A, Riha J, Horner P, French RS, Randall S, and Macintosh M, 'Variation in positivity of genital chlamydial infection amongst young people: results from the English National Chlamydia Screening Programme 2007/08'. (in press Sexually Transmitted Diseases).
- 3 'Sexually Transmitted Infections and Young People in the United Kingdom: 2008 Report,' Health Protection Agency.