

# Research advises against screening campaign for chlamydia, recommends action plan to promote sexual health

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New research carried out by researchers from NUI Galway, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) has found that a national screening campaign for chlamydia in young people would not prove cost effective. The research also explored the attitudes, fears and preferences of young Irish men and women aged 18-29 years old towards accepting tests to detect chlamydia.

The [Chlamydia Screening](#) in Ireland [Pilot Study](#), which was funded by the [Health Protection](#) Surveillance Centre and supported by the Health Research Board, looked at the feasibility of opportunistic screening in a general practice setting for [chlamydia](#), which is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Like other countries, Ireland is experiencing a steady increase in the numbers of young women and men presenting to the health services with STIs; the annual numbers of cases of chlamydia rose from 1000 in 1997 to around 6000 in 2008-09.

Chlamydia is the most commonly reported bacterial STI in Ireland, with highest numbers reported among 20-29 year olds. More often than not it is silent and causes no symptoms – especially in women – but can cause serious complications such as infertility and ectopic pregnancies.

Dr Emer O’Connell, Consultant in Public Health Medicine in the HSE presented study findings at Ireland’s first ever [Sexual Health](#) Awareness Week, which was officially launched in the Royal College of Physicians

of Ireland today. “Screening for chlamydia is available in many countries. However, some countries such as Australia are reviewing the effectiveness of this measure. In Ireland, due to our small population and the strain already on our health service, a screening programme for chlamydia would not be cost effective because it would be difficult to achieve the necessary coverage levels to reduce the level of infection.”

The research found that the main barrier reported by young people to seeking or accepting an STI test was the stigma associated with chlamydia and other STIs. This stigma was greatest among women especially those from rural backgrounds and in urban working class areas who feared the consequences of being publicly exposed – to their families and peers –through asking for an STI test.

Despite the stigma associated with an STI test, there was a high level of willingness among young men and women to take a chlamydia test if offered by a health professional. 95% said it would be acceptable to be offered the test and 75% of students said they would accept the test if offered. The research also found that 80% of those involved in the study said they would inform their current partner if they tested positive for chlamydia but this rate fell to 55-60% in the case of previous partners.

Professor Ruairi Brugha, Head of the Department of Epidemiology & Public Health Medicine, RCSI said: “While this study demonstrated that a national chlamydia screening programme would not be cost-effective in Ireland, it reports important positive findings. Young people are aware of the risks and are anxious that [STI](#) testing services be made accessible and acceptable. We also found that there are primary care providers who are willing to provide such services.”

Dr Diarmuid O’Donovan, College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, NUI Galway said “The study findings provide evidence of how to protect the sexual health of young Irish people. Given these findings, a

national sexual health plan should include primary prevention activities such as sex education, condom distribution and the provision of information on how to seek care for STIs. Therefore, we recommend the inclusion of primary care-delivered chlamydia detection and case management services as part of a national action plan to promote sexual health.”

The research from The Chlamydia Screening in Ireland Pilot Study will be presented today during Ireland’s first ever national Sexual Health Awareness Week (SHAW). SHAW is being hosted by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI). A range of public meetings, debates and interactive workshops promoting sexual health awareness at a national level are taking place in RCPI from 28th -31st May, all of which are free and open to the public.

Provided by Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)

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