

Young People's Sexual Health Briefing

March 2025

Contents

Contents.....1

Executive Summary.....2

Introduction3

Local Sexual Health Services in Darlington.....3

Methodology.....5

Purpose of the Survey.....5

Survey Responses and Key Themes5

Recommendations.....10

Primary Healthcare Darlington Response:11

Acknowledgements11

Executive Summary

This report presents an analysis of **young people's experiences with sexual health services in Darlington**. Based on a survey conducted by Healthwatch Darlington, the findings highlight **awareness levels, service usage, challenges, gaps in education, and barriers to access**. The report also includes recommendations for improving **service provision, accessibility, and education**.

The survey revealed that **62.22%** of respondents were **aware** of available sexual health services, while **37.78%** were **unaware**. Of those surveyed, **35.71%** had used sexual health services, with the majority seeking **STI testing (70%)** and **contraception (60%)**. Key barriers to access included **stigma, embarrassment, difficulty securing appointments**, and a **lack of information**. When asked about service quality, **59.09%** of respondents expressed neutrality, while **18.18%** were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. **Online resources** were the **preferred method** of obtaining sexual health information for **60%** of young people. Additionally, gaps in education were identified, with **50%** highlighting a **lack of STI awareness**, **33.33%** noting **insufficient coverage of LGBTQ+ issues**, and **16.67%** calling for **better education on consent**.

To address these concerns, the report recommends increasing awareness through targeted campaigns, improving accessibility by expanding services, reducing stigma through education, and enhancing digital outreach and educational content.



Introduction

Recent data from the **Office for Health Improvement & Disparities** indicates evolving patterns in contraceptive use and reproductive health outcomes across England. The latest update, covering **2023**, shows that while **oral contraceptives** remain popular, there has been a notable increase in the use of **long-acting reversible contraception (LARC)**, such as **implants** and **intrauterine devices (IUDs)**. This trend suggests a growing preference for more effective, longer-term solutions.

Despite these advancements, **challenges persist**. Hospital admission rates for conditions like **ectopic pregnancies** and **pelvic inflammatory disease** have remained stable, underscoring the need for continuous education and preventive measures. Disparities in access to sexual health services remain, particularly among underserved populations, highlighting the importance of targeted interventions.

Against this national backdrop, **Healthwatch Darlington** conducted a survey to assess **young people's experiences** with **sexual health services** in the **local area**. The objective was to understand **awareness levels, access issues, service quality, and key areas for improvement**. The findings aim to inform strategies for enhancing sexual health support and education for young people in Darlington.

Local Sexual Health Services in Darlington

Darlington offers a range of sexual health services to cater to the needs of its residents. These services are free, confidential, and accessible to individuals of all ages, including those under 16.

a) **Darlington Sexual Health Hub**

The Darlington Sexual Health Hub, managed by County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT), provides comprehensive sexual health care. Services include STI testing and treatment, contraception advice, and sexual health counselling. Currently, walk-in services are suspended, but pre-booked appointments can be scheduled by contacting the hub directly.

Contact: 01325 743203

Website: <https://www.cddft.nhs.uk/services/sexual-health>

b) Contraception Clinics

For community contraceptive services, including long-acting reversible contraception (IUDs, IUS, and implants), residents can access clinics operated by Primary Healthcare Darlington. Appointments are required and can be arranged by calling the number below.

Contact: 01325 952278 (option 3)

Website: <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/public-health/sexual-health-services/>

c) Emergency Contraception

Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC), commonly known as the "morning after" pill, is available free of charge. Residents can obtain EHC from participating pharmacies in Darlington, their own GP's or Primary Healthcare Darlington.

Pharmacy List: <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/public-health/sexual-health-services/>

Contact: 01325 952278 (option 3)

Website: <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/public-health/sexual-health-services/>

d) Online STI Testing

Residents aged 16 and over can order free and confidential STI testing kits online. These kits screen for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and HIV, and are delivered discreetly to your home.

Order Kits: <https://www.sh24.org.uk/>

e) C-Card Scheme

Young people aged between 13 and 24 can access free condoms through the C-Card scheme. Registration and collection points are available across Darlington. [C Card Outlets](#)

Information: [Free condoms & C Card :: County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Methodology

A structured survey was distributed to young people across Darlington, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data on awareness, service usage, barriers, and satisfaction levels. Responses were analysed to identify key themes and trends.

Purpose of the Survey

The survey was designed to assess young people's awareness of available sexual health services and identify the barriers preventing access. It also gathered feedback on service quality, highlighted gaps in sexual health education, and explored young people's preferred methods of accessing information. The findings will help stakeholders improve service provision, outreach strategies, and education programs.

Survey Responses and Key Themes

1. Are you aware of the Sexual Health Services available in your area?

Responses:

- Yes: 62.22% (28 respondents)
- No: 37.78% (17 respondents)

Key Themes:

- Most respondents were aware of services, but a significant portion (over one-third) were not.
- There is a need for better promotion of services.

2. Have you ever used Sexual Health Services in Darlington?

Responses:

- Yes: 35.71% (10 respondents)
- No: 64.29% (18 respondents)

Key Themes:

- The majority had not accessed services, suggesting barriers to use or a lack of need.
- Awareness does not always translate into service usage.

3. If yes, which services have you accessed? (Select all that apply)

Responses:

- STI testing and treatment: 70% (7 respondents)
- Contraception: 60% (6 respondents)
- Sexual health advice and counselling: 10% (1 respondent)
- Pregnancy testing: 0% (0 respondents)
- Other: 0% (0 respondents)

Key Themes:

- STI testing was the most accessed service.
- Pregnancy testing was not accessed at all, indicating possible gaps in availability or awareness.

4. What topics do you feel were not covered adequately in your sexual health education? (Tick all that apply)

Responses:

- STIs: 50% (3 respondents)
- Healthy relationships: 50% (3 respondents)
- LGBTQ+ issues: 33.33% (2 respondents)
- Consent: 16.67% (1 respondent)
- Contraception: 16.67% (1 respondent)
- Other: 0% (0 respondents)

Key Themes:

- STI education and healthy relationships were the most cited gaps.
- LGBTQ+ topics were also noted as an area needing improvement.

5. Were there any challenges you faced when seeking Sexual Health Services?

Responses: (8 open-ended responses)

"No challenges, just very embarrassing."

"The stigma surrounding sexual health."

"Getting an appointment."

"Awkward."

"Staff didn't care."

"Lack of C-card outlets."

"No issues."

Key Themes:

- Stigma and embarrassment were common concerns.
- Appointment availability was mentioned as a challenge.
- Lack of engagement from staff was noted.

6. What improvements would you like to see in Sexual Health Services?

Responses: (8 open-ended responses)

"Easier accessible advice."

"Same-day appointments."

"More advertising for people to know about services."

"More C-card outlets."

"Services to be more readily available and in easier accessible areas."

Key Themes:

- Easier access to information and appointments.
- Improved advertising to increase awareness.

7. How would you prefer to receive Sexual Health information and advice? (Select all that apply)

Responses:

- Online resources: 60% (27 respondents)
- Phone consultations: 40% (18 respondents)
- In-person consultation: 31.11% (14 respondents)
- Workshops or classes: 20% (9 respondents)

Key Themes:

- Online resources were the most preferred method, suggesting a shift towards digital access.
- In-person services still had some demand but were less popular than virtual options.

8. How satisfied are you with the current Sexual Health Services available for young people?

Responses:

- Very satisfied: 6.82% (3 respondents)

- Satisfied: 15.91% (7 respondents)
- Neutral: 59.09% (26 respondents)
- Dissatisfied: 15.91% (7 respondents)
- Very dissatisfied: 2.27% (1 respondent)

Key Themes:

- The majority of respondents were neutral, indicating neither strong satisfaction nor dissatisfaction.
- A small percentage were dissatisfied, highlighting areas for improvement.

9. Have you ever faced barriers to accessing Sexual Health Services? (Select all that apply)

Responses:

- Lack of information: 34.21% (13 respondents)
- Stigma: 31.58% (12 respondents)
- Privacy concerns: 23.68% (9 respondents)
- Cost: 5.26% (2 respondents)
- Distance/location: 2.63% (1 respondent)
- Other: 31.58% (12 respondents)

Key Themes:

- Information gaps and stigma were the biggest barriers.
- Privacy concerns were also noted.

10. How comfortable would you feel discussing Sexual Health topics with healthcare providers?

Responses:

- Very comfortable: 18.18% (8 respondents)
- Comfortable: 25% (11 respondents)
- Neutral: 29.55% (13 respondents)
- Uncomfortable: 18.18% (8 respondents)
- Very uncomfortable: 9.09% (4 respondents)

Key Themes:

- Nearly half of respondents felt neutral or uncomfortable, suggesting a need for a more supportive environment.
- Some respondents felt confident discussing sexual health, but discomfort was still present.

11. What is your ethnic group?

Responses:

- White British: 88.64% (39 respondents)
- Asian (various subcategories): 4.54% (2 respondents)
- Mixed backgrounds: 4.54% (2 respondents)
- Other ethnicities: 2.27% (1 respondent)

Key Themes:

- The majority of respondents identified as White British.
- There was limited representation from other ethnic groups.

12. What is your gender?

Responses:

- Male: 54.55% (24 respondents)
- Female: 40.91% (18 respondents)
- Non-binary: 2.27% (1 respondent)
- Prefer not to say: 2.27% (1 respondent)

13. What is your age?

Responses:

- 12-15: 27.50% (11 respondents)
- 16-18: 37.50% (15 respondents)
- 19-21: 17.50% (7 respondents)
- 22-24: 17.50% (7 respondents)



Recommendations

1. Increase Awareness of Sexual Health Services

Findings: 37.78% of young people were unaware of available services.

Recommendations:

- Improve promotion of services through schools, colleges, youth groups, and social media.
- Consider targeted outreach campaigns using digital platforms preferred by young people.

2. Improve Accessibility to Services

Findings: Barriers cited included stigma, difficulty getting appointments, and lack of C-card outlets.

Recommendations:

- Expand drop-in services and same-day appointment options.
- Increase the availability of C-card distribution points in schools, youth clubs, and pharmacies.
- Ensure services are youth-friendly and that staff are trained in creating a non-judgmental environment.

3. Strengthen Education on Key Topics

Findings: 50% of young people felt STI education and healthy relationships were not covered adequately. LGBTQ+ issues were also a gap.

Recommendations:

- Work with schools to enhance Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) content, ensuring topics such as consent, LGBTQ+ issues, and STI prevention are fully addressed.
- Provide online resources and workshops tailored to young people's concerns.

4. Reduce Stigma and Privacy Concerns

Findings: 31.58% of respondents cited stigma as a barrier, and 23.68% had privacy concerns.

Recommendations:

- Promote confidential access to sexual health services, reinforcing the message that appointments and consultations are private.

- Develop an online chat or anonymous Q&A service for young people to ask questions without fear of judgment.

5. Improve Engagement with Healthcare Providers

Findings: 27.27% of young people felt uncomfortable discussing sexual health with healthcare providers.

Recommendations:

- Provide additional training to staff to ensure they create a comfortable, approachable environment.
- Encourage young people to share feedback on their experiences through surveys or youth advisory panels.

Primary Healthcare Darlington Response:

"This report is interesting to read. The services provided by PHD are accessible to young people, we have an online presence and our phone lines are open 8am until 6pm Monday to Thursday and 8am until 4pm on a Friday. Our waiting time is no more than two weeks for general contraception and we offer same day access for Emergency Contraception on four days per week. We are looking at increasing the C-Card Scheme across Darlington Practices and administering our own patient survey in the future to gather feedback from a larger sample of young people, then implementing changes as appropriate".

Elizabeth Simpson, Operations Manager, Primary Healthcare Darlington

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the young people who took the time to share their views and experiences as part of this report. Your voices are invaluable in helping to shape services that are truly responsive to your needs. Every insight you provided has contributed to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within sexual health support in Darlington. Thank you for speaking up – your voice matters.



Healthwatch Darlington Limited
c/o Tandem Hub,
Morton Park Business Training Centre
Morton Park Way
DARLINGTON
DL1 4PJ
01325 380145 or 07525237723
Email: info@healthwatchdarlington.co.uk
Website: www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk