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Media Release

Affection or Infection? It's your choice

Walk in clinic at the Royal United Hospital offers screening and treatment for STIs in the run up to Valentine's Day

This Saturday, February 14th, will see an increase in sales of red roses, a flurry of red envelopes in the post and boxes of chocolates flying off the shelves.

And whilst love, and sex, has been proven to be good for you, with the rush of endorphins and 'happy hormones' to your head, the message from the RUH is to be generous with your affection, but don't risk an infection.

Kate Horn, consultant at the GUM clinic in the hospital says "Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are still on the rise, with chlamydia the most common bacterial STI out there. You never know who might have it; you can't tell my looking at someone if they have an infection. You might also have an infection yourself – and not know about it.

"But it's not something to be scared of; chlamydia is easily treated and cured with simple antibiotics as long as it's found early, but it can cause problems in the longer term if you don't deal with it."

The RUH walk in clinic is open for anyone on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 8:15 – 11:00. The clinic encourages people to get checked before they start a new relationship, after unprotected sex and condom accidents, and also come along once a year for screening, even if they believe they've been having safe sex.

Kate adds "If you have no symptoms and just want a check, guys need only pee in a pot and girls can take their own swab for Chlamydia testing. Blood testing for HIV is offered to everyone too. Think of it as getting an MOT for your car or having your phone upgraded – it doesn't take long, you'll give yourself a better service and fix any problems you might have been having!"

"If an STI is not treated it doesn't go away. As long as you have an STI, you can pass it on to somebody else – and perhaps cause permanent damage to your health, or your partner's health."

"Using a condom is the best way to prevent an STI and even though you may know someone really well, you can't always see if they have an infection – they may not even know themselves. So make sure you both get screened before changing to another form of contraception such as the pill."

The RUH service is completely confidential and free to everyone, and you don't need to tell your GP or be referred, you can just pop along in your own time. Kate, who's been working in the clinic since 1999, feels it's important that people feel comfortable coming along to the clinic.

"The whole team is very friendly and approachable, right from the receptionists who will greet you, to the nurses and doctors who can treat you. We know you might feel embarrassed – but we always try to make it as easy as possible and we're a nice bunch of people. Come and talk to us about any worries you might have; you can phone 824617 for an appointment or attend one of the walk-in clinics on Monday, Wednesday or Friday 08.15 – 11.00. Everyone contacting us will be offered the opportunity of attending within 48 hours."

Ends

Notes for editors

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *chlamydia trachomatis*. In the UK, the number of new diagnoses has been steadily increasing each year since the mid-1990s, and it has now become the most commonly diagnosed STI.

Chlamydia is often called the 'silent' disease due to the lack of noticeable symptoms. Because of this, many cases of chlamydia remain undiagnosed. Around 50% of men and 70% of women who have the chlamydia infection will have no symptoms at all and many others have symptoms so minor, they go unnoticed.

Chlamydia is on the rise in the South West, with a 62% rise in cases from 2001 to 2007.

The greatest prevalence of STIs is among young people (aged 16 to 24 years).

Despite representing just 11% of the population, this age group was diagnosed with 67% of all new chlamydia cases, 54% of all genital warts and 49% of all gonorrhoea cases in 2007. Chlamydia remains the most commonly diagnosed STI in the region with 9,832 new cases reported in 2007.