

Health Services in the UK

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Health Services in the UK

This booklet is for asylum seekers and helps to explain what health services are available in the UK. This resource is available in other languages and versions can be downloaded from www.bcathealthinitiative.co.uk. This resource was produced in Leeds in 2004 by; The Black Health Initiative, Yorkshire MESMAC, the NHS Sexual Health and Substance Use Team (Leeds PCTs), Health Access Team for asylum seekers.

Leeds Social Services helped with the translation of this resource.

The National Health Service (NHS)

What is the NHS?

In the UK health care is provided through a National Health Service (NHS). The following guide is relevant if you are seeking asylum in the UK and have not had a final decision from the Home Office.

Is the NHS free?

If you are an asylum seeker you are entitled to most health care for free under the NHS. This includes emergency hospital treatment, medical/pregnancy care and family planning. The following information in this pack describes most of the free treatments you will be entitled to if you need them.

What is a prescription?

If you need medicine a doctor may give you a prescription. A prescription is a ticket that describes what your doctor wants you to take. In order to collect your medicine you need to take the prescription to a pharmacist. Doctors will not always give you a prescription for medicines you want; some may say you need to buy it yourself from the chemist.

Do I have to pay for prescriptions?

Prescriptions are free for asylum seekers but you will need a HC2 form from National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to prove you are entitled to free medicines. In the UK some people have to pay for prescriptions for medicines and seeing a dentist or optician. Because asylum seekers can't work in the UK you are entitled to these for free. In order to prove you have this entitlement you will need a HC2 form.

What is a HC2 form?

A HC2 form is something that you have to apply for every six months. To get a HC2 form you could:

- Ask your housing worker who visits you (if you are in NASS housing) to help you.
- Go to a pharmacist or GP Surgery and fill in a HC2 form.

Confidentiality

Where will information be shared?

The NHS is a separate department to Immigration. **All staff who work for the NHS have to keep any information about patients CONFIDENTIAL.** They are not allowed to share information about you to immigration or NASS without your permission. In some circumstances health information may be shared from doctor to doctor or nurse to nurse. This would only be done if it was beneficial to your health and would only be passed to another health worker and would be treated with extreme care, not to be passed to the wrong person. In cases where there may be a risk to children's health and welfare, or if someone was seriously at risk (such as of dying) confidentiality may be broken. If you are ever in doubt about where information is being shared you are entitled to ask.

Interpreters in the NHS

How do I communicate if I don't speak English?

If you find it difficult to communicate in English, you are entitled to ask for an interpreter if you are seeing a doctor or nurse. It should not be expected that you take relatives or friends to appointments to interpret for you.

The interpreters have to keep what is discussed confidential. If you are unhappy with the interpreter or worried about confidentiality and you do not want that interpreter, you can say this to the worker/health professional

Ways in which you can ask for an interpreter are:

- To ask the Doctor, Nurse or worker directly.

Complaints or problems when using the NHS

What do I do if I have a complaint about an NHS service?

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is here to help you when you need advice, have concerns or don't know where to turn. PALS is for patients their families and friends and offers help about local health services and aims to provide solutions. The service listens to what you have to say and provides valuable

Produced in Leeds in 2004 by Leeds City Council HIV, Sexual Health & Substance Use Team, Yorkshire MESMAC, Black Health Initiative, Health Access Team, NHS Sexual Health & Substance Use Team (Leeds PCT's), www.bcathealthinitiative.co.uk

feedback to NHS staff and allows us to develop a more patient focused health service. What PALS Can do for you;

- Provide information about other health care providers and support organisations that may be of use to you.
- Receive comments good or bad about our services and make sure the feedback is used to improve services provided to patients.
- Explain the complaints procedure and how to get in touch with someone who can help.
- Work with you and health staff to resolve problems or concerns that you may have.

Emergency Health Services Provided by the NHS

Accident and Emergency Department (A&E)

What is an Accident and Emergency Department (A&E)?

If you have an accident or are seriously ill you may need to be treated at an A&E Department at a nearby hospital. This is free and available for everyone. The A&E department is open day and night. If you are in very urgent need you will be seen immediately. In all other situations your details will be taken and you may have to wait several hours to be seen.

You should think carefully whether or not your condition/illness is an emergency, as you may be preventing others with life threatening conditions from getting emergency care if you use A&E and it's not an emergency.

What is an Emergency?

Examples of emergencies are as follows;

- Collapse
- New or severe chest pain
- Chest pain
- Unconsciousness
- Heavy blood loss
- Suspected broken bones
- Deep wounds such as stab wounds
- Severe breathing difficulties
- Head injury
- Car accidents

What about babies and children?

Babies and children can become seriously ill more easily than adults.

How do I know if my baby is seriously ill?

Parents are usually good at noticing when something is seriously wrong with their baby. Here are some signs that can be important:

- When awake, your baby may seem unusually drowsy or not interested in looking at you
- Your baby may not be interested in feeding, or is vomiting
- Your baby may feel floppy and limp and may look pale
- A new rash appears or their skin appears bruised or discoloured.
- Your baby seems hot and feverish and you are worried.

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- Your baby seems breathless or is breathing much faster than usual
- Your baby's cry seems different (perhaps moaning, whimpering or shrill), and soothing doesn't help

How do I get to the A&E Department?

You can go yourself to the nearest A&E or call an ambulance to take you there.

How do I call an ambulance?

You should telephone 999 for an emergency ambulance. This is a free call even from a payphone. You will be asked what service you need as 999 is also the number you ring for the Fire and Police Service. If you want to get an ambulance in an emergency:

- Dial 999
- Tell the operator that you need an ambulance
- You will be asked where you are
- Explain what is wrong

Once an ambulance comes, it will take you to your nearest hospital A&E department.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT RINGING AN AMBULANCE IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT AN EMERGENCY.

HOWEVER, REMEMBER THAT YOUR GP SURGERY IS WHERE YOU SHOULD GO FOR TREATMENT OF NON EMERGENCY PROBLEMS.

- A&E is not an alternative to your GP Surgery (see section on GP Surgery)
- Calling 999 does not get you to the top of the A&E queue
- All patients are seen on the basis of medical need
- Not all injuries require x-rays
- Your GP is an expert in general medical problems. A&E doctors are specialists in accidents and emergencies

GP (Doctor's) Surgeries

What is a GP Surgery?

In the UK GP Surgeries (sometimes called clinics or health centres) provide most of the health care for you. All asylum seekers are entitled and expected to register with a GP Surgery near where you live. **It is very important to register with a GP surgery as soon as you are able to after your arrival.**

Registering with a GP Surgery

Should I register with a GP Surgery even if I'm not ill?

Even if you are not ill it is important that you register with a GP Surgery. This is so that if you become ill you can be seen as soon as possible.

How do I register with a GP Surgery?

Ways in which you can register are:

- You can visit your local Health Centre or GP Surgery and ask if they can register you.

A GP Surgery will only register patients who live in the area around their practice. When you go to register take some form of identification with you. You may want to take your IND card and something with your address on it. If the surgery already has too many patients they may not be able to register you. They should not refuse you just because you are an asylum seeker.

Once a surgery has accepted your registration, they will send for any previous GP notes you have if you have been registered elsewhere in the UK. All this information is treated with confidence and not shared with anyone other than the GP Surgery or a doctor or nurse.

You will be asked to fill out a form and probably have to return for a health check with the Practice Nurse (see below). It is helpful to take any health records you have with you. **If you have been to an induction centre or have a red, purple or blue book, please take this with you to all health appointments.**

General Practitioners (GPs) / Family Doctor's

What do GPs do?

GPs are doctors who work in GP Surgeries. A GP is the first doctor you normally see in this country if you are unwell. GPs can also provide:

- Advice and treatment for medical problems
- Tests
- Prescriptions for you to get medicines to treat or prevent problems
- Advice and treatment if you have mental health problems
- Care during pregnancy
- Referrals to specialists at the hospital and other centres. (Referrals would only be done if the doctor thinks they are necessary).
- Family planning and free contraception for women
- Help to prevent you getting ill

GPs work in surgeries or health centres near where you live (not hospitals). Many conditions that are treated by hospital doctors in other parts of the world can be treated by GP's in the UK.

Practice Nurses

What do Practice Nurses do?

Practice Nurses work in GP Surgeries. Some of the services they provide are:

- New patient checks, which normally happen around the time you register
- Vaccinations for children and adults
- Treatment for some minor injuries
- Cervical smears and well-women checks
- Advice about many illnesses and how to stay healthy

Making an appointment at the GP Surgery

How do I make an appointment at the GP Surgery?

Most GP surgeries will only see people by appointment. It is therefore very important to make an appointment. Try and phone or go to the surgery between 0830 and 0900 hours. When booking an appointment, if you need an interpreter, let the receptionist know as they may book you in for a longer time.

A few GP surgeries have walk-in times where there are no appointments and you sit and wait. You need to check with your GP surgery to see if they have this system.

When you register with a GP, it is a good idea to ask how you make appointments to see the doctor or nurse so that you understand how to do it in the future. The surgery should have a leaflet, which gives you information about the surgery and what it offers patients.

What do I do if the GP Surgery is closed?

Your GP's Surgery may be closed some afternoons, evenings, weekends and public holidays. If you or your children feel sick and want to see a doctor, telephone your GP's Surgery. An answer phone with a recorded message will give you the number of the doctor that works at night or weekends or bank holidays. Call this number and the doctor will advise you or visit you at home. You can also ring NHS Direct for advice; remember they can access an interpreter (see section on NHS Direct). If you feel it is an emergency go to an Accident and Emergency department (A&E) at your nearest hospital or call 999 for an ambulance if you are too ill to get there yourself (See section Emergency Health Services).

Accessing interpreters at the GP Surgery

What do I do if I don't speak English?

Ways in which you can request an interpreter at your GP Surgery are:

- Ask the receptionist at the surgery to request an interpreter for your appointment.
- Ask the GP/ nurse directly when they see you.

What do I do if I'm told at the GP Surgery that they cannot provide an interpreter?

Ways in which you can get help to access an interpreter at the GP Surgery are:

- Contact the Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS) who will try and help you.

Changing GP Surgeries

How do I change my GP Surgery?

If for any reason you want to change GP, you are entitled to do so. If you want to change your practice you can try to register again at another surgery (see how to register with a GP). Just visit another practice and ask to be registered. You do not have to explain why you are changing doctors. You can also ask to see a male or female doctor if one is available at the practice.

NHS Direct

What is NHS Direct?

IF YOU NEED HEALTH ADVICE OR ARE UNSURE WHETHER YOU NEED TO SEE A DOCTOR URGENTLY YOU CAN PHONE NHS DIRECT ON 0845 4647.

NHS Direct operates a 24-hour nurse advice and health information service, providing confidential information on:

- What to do if you or your family are feeling ill
- Advice on particular health conditions, self-help and support organisations.
- Advice on local health care services, such as dentists or late night opening chemists.

How do I use NHS Direct?

Call the NHS Direct telephone service on **0845 4647**.

You will be asked to provide some basic information about yourself and to describe the nature of your call. If you need advice about a health problem, for yourself or on behalf of someone else you are required to explain:

- What the symptoms are, how they affect you/the person and when they began
- What you/ the person have tried already
- Any drugs you/ the person are already taking
- Any existing medical conditions
- Anything else you think is important

NHS Direct Nurses are very skilled and experienced and use a computer system to advise you safely on the most appropriate course of action.

Accessing interpreters at NHS Direct

What do I do if I don't speak English?

NHS Direct can provide free confidential interpreters, in many languages, within minutes of your call. To ask for an interpreter you should:

- Ring the NHS Direct number – 0845 4647
- When your call is answered, say the English word for the language you wish to use
- Wait on the line until you are connected to an interpreter who will help NHS Direct give you the health information you need.

Hospitals

When would I go to hospital?

If the treatment your GP gives you does not make you better or you need a special test, your GP may refer you to a hospital. You cannot decide by yourself to go, only your GP can send you. It may take some months before you receive an appointment. The NHS often has short to long term waiting lists i.e. six weeks to six months.

What should I do with letters I receive from the hospital?

When you receive a letter from your GP, Hospital, or Health Authority it is very important that you do not ignore it or throw it away. It could be an appointment that has been booked for you to see a specialist doctor for the result of a test that was done, or to inform you that an interpreter has been booked for you. You can save you bus tickets to claim back your travel money when going to the hospital for an appointment. Ask the person you see at the hospital about this.

If you have any difficulties understanding letters you have been sent or want to change an appointment and don't know how you can:

- Ask at your GP surgery or someone else to help you (if you are not worried about confidential health information)

Pharmacies (also known as Chemists)

What is a Pharmacy?

A pharmacy is a shop where you can get medicines from. They will give you medicines if your GP gives you a prescription and also sell some medicines to you directly without a prescription. Pharmacies can also sometimes give you advice about simple medical problems e.g. coughs and colds.

Ways in which you can get help to access a pharmacy are:

- Ask in a local supermarket or shop where the nearest chemist is.
- Go yourself to any chemist shop.

You can call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 to ask where your late night Pharmacies are

Dentists

What is a dentist?

In the UK only dentists provide dental care, GPs and other doctors will not be able to treat dental problems.

You should register with a dentist in your area to allow you to receive check ups and routine dental treatment. Not all dentists provide NHS treatment, so check before you register.

How do I register with a dentist?

Ways in which you can find a dentist are:

- Ask in a local supermarket or shop where the nearest dentist is
- Go yourself and ask to register
- Call NHS Direct on 0845 4647

Is the treatment free at the dentist?

In order to be eligible for free NHS dental treatment you will need a HC2 form from NASS.

What would I do if I need emergency dental treatment?

Ways in which you can access a dentist in an emergency are:

Opticians (eye care)

What is an Optician?

Opticians test your sight and prescribe glasses and contact lenses. They also detect serious eye diseases such as glaucoma.

Is treatment free at the Optician?

In order to be entitled to a free eyesight test and help with the cost of glasses you will need a HC2 form.

How do I find an Optician?

Ways in which you can find an optician are:

- Ask in a local supermarket or shop where the nearest Opticians are.
- Go yourself and ask to register
- Ring NHS Direct on 0845 4647

Contraception (also known as family planning)

Where can I get Contraception?

Contraception is free in the UK. There are many different methods of contraception to prevent pregnancy. You can also access free condoms which can help protect you from Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV. All information about contraception is kept confidential. You can access free contraception and advice from:

- Your GP
- Family planning clinics

What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception can be used if you have had sex without using contraception or think your contraception method may have failed. You can access emergency contraception up to five days after sex, although it is best to access this as soon as possible, usually within 72 hours. Within 72 hours you will usually be given a single dose of the emergency contraception pill but up to 5 days you usually have a coil fitted. The earlier you access this, the more effective it is in preventing pregnancy.

Where can I get emergency contraception?

Ways in which you can get emergency contraception are:

- You can see a GP
- Go to a Family Planning Clinic
- Phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 and find the nearest place to where you live which provides emergency contraception.
- You can get it from some chemists but you will have to pay

What are Family Planning Clinics (Contraception and Sexual Health Clinics)?

These are free clinics, which you can attend without going to see your GP first. They provide advice and free supplies of contraception including emergency contraception. They also offer some screening for women, including cervical smears. You can phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647 to find your nearest family planning clinic.

Mental Health

What is mental ill health?

Mental ill health can be experienced by anybody at anytime and in a variety of ways from feeling sad, anxious, stressed to feeling like life is not worth living, or a combination of any of these. You may feel isolated and lonely in the new country, anxious and worried about family you have left behind, or you may have been tortured/ raped in your country and need support to deal with these experiences.

Where can I go for help?

If you experience anything like this you can:

- See your GP

If you or somebody close to you is experiencing extreme distress and are at risk of harming themselves or wanting to take their own life, try and get them to the local A&E department for help 24 hours a day.

It is important to remember that help is available and not to be afraid to ask for help. Mental ill health is a well recognised and understood difficulty that anyone can face in their life and there are well established services available that anyone can access.

Sexual Health

Why might I be concerned about my sexual health?

You may find you need access to services and support for your sexual health. This may be for a number of reasons:

- You may have been raped
- You may have been forced to work in the sex trade
- You may have been living in a country where you know that many people have been living with or died of HIV/AIDS
- You may notice some symptoms showing that something is wrong with your sexual health and not have experienced any of the above.

If you have encountered any of the above you may have been put at an increased risk of Sexually Transmitted Infection (STIs) and HIV and you may want to consider accessing testing and support. You may also require some emotional support to deal with your experience.

Where might I go for help with a sexual health problem?

Sexual health services are free services to help people take control over many issues to do with their own sexual health. The services available can help with a range of issues covering contraception to help plan when somebody wants to have children to testing and treatments for the infections and viruses, known as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that can be passed on through sexual contact.

Ways in which you can get advice or help about a sexual health problem are:

- To go to your GP
- To go to your nearest Sexual health Clinic
- **If you find you are having problems accessing sexual health advice or treatment you could phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647 for further advice**

National Sexual Health Services / Support

The African Aids Helpline

Free phone 0800 0967 500

Calls do not show on bills

The Sexual Health Helpline

0800 567 123

Terrence Higgins Trust Helpline

0845 1221 200

NHS DIRECT

0845 46 47

For information about services near you

Sexual Health Clinics

What are Sexual Health or GUM Clinics?

These are clinics that have doctors and nurses that are specially trained to test, diagnose and treat sexually transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV. If you are concerned that you may have been exposed to an STI or HIV you can have tests and access to treatments at these clinics. This service is free and confidential.

How do you access a Sexual Health clinic?

Ways in which you can access a Sexual Health Clinic are:

- You can be referred to the clinic by your GP
- Or if you have symptoms telling you that there is something wrong with your sexual health, you can phone and book an appointment for yourself.

HIV

What might happen if I want a HIV test?

A test for HIV is free and confidential and you can get the test results within a few days or sometimes on the same day. You do not have to tell anybody that you are having a HIV test. If you have a positive HIV test, specialist doctors and nurses are available to talk to about what it will mean for your health. They will also look at treatment options for you to help you stay well and healthy for longer.

How would I be able to arrange a HIV test?

If you would like to have a test for HIV or would like to see somebody to talk to about having a test, you can contact:

- Your GP
- Your Local Centre for Sexual Health / GUM clinic

Women's Health Services

Pregnancy

What should I do if I think I am pregnant?

If you think you are pregnant you should make a routine appointment to see your GP. Your GP will then do a pregnancy test if you have not already done this. If the test is positive and you are pregnant, your GP will then refer you to a Midwife and the Hospital.

What is a midwife?

Midwives are specially trained to look after women and babies during pregnancy and childbirth. They work in hospitals and in the community. A pregnancy in a new cultural environment and at a time of instability can be a very emotional and stressful time. Midwives are trained to provide physical and emotional care to meet your individual needs, and to support you (and your family) throughout your pregnancy, labour and the first month after the baby is born.

Where will I see the midwife and what will happen?

The midwife will see you at home, the local Health Centre or the GP surgery. They will take a medical history, ask you when your last period was and discuss any previous pregnancies you may have had. The Midwife will complete a maternity record document, which you will then be given to carry with you to all health appointments.

The Midwife will give you information about maternity services and ask you where you want your baby to be delivered. Your midwife will ask about any operations you may have had in the past. If you have been circumcised, it is important to tell your midwife. This will enable your midwife to provide appropriate and effective medical and emotional care, and to devise a plan of care for your pregnancy and delivery.

When will I have to go to the hospital?

If you are well during your pregnancy you will have most of your care with your community Midwife. You will be sent an appointment to have an ultrasound scan at about week 20 of your pregnancy. You will have to go to the hospital for this. If the doctor wants to monitor your pregnancy, further hospital appointments may be made. Most women only need to be seen at the hospital once or twice during the entire pregnancy. The rest of your check ups will be mainly with your Midwife or GP at the Health Centre or GP Surgery.

All pregnant women are offered a HIV test. Most women choose to have the test because if a woman is HIV positive, the hospital can plan the labour to reduce the risk of passing HIV on to the baby during the birth. The hospital will also provide information and support around feeding the baby as breast feeding can also be a route for HIV to be transmitted to the baby.

What happens when my baby is due?

In hospital you can have someone present with you when you deliver your baby. If you have a partner or a friend they would be very welcome to be with you. If you have arranged to have your baby at home, the midwife will have discussed all the arrangements with you three weeks before you are due to have your baby.

After your baby is born, if there are no complications, women choose to go home as soon as six hours after the birth. The midwife in hospital will discuss this with you.

When you take your baby home, your Midwife will visit you at home at times agreed with you, depending on your needs. In between ten and fourteen days after your baby is born, your Health Visitor will also visit you.

Abortion / Termination of Pregnancy

What is the law about Abortion?

In England, Wales and Scotland women can have an abortion if they do not want to continue with the pregnancy. Abortions are legally allowed up to 24 weeks of pregnancy although most women would have an abortion a lot earlier than this, as it is better to carry out an abortion early in the pregnancy. If you are pregnant, and not sure if you want to have the baby, there are a number of people you can talk to about this. **It is important that you seek advice as soon as possible.**

Where might I go for advice about having an abortion?

Ways in which you can get advice on having an abortion are:

- To go to your GP
- To go to the nearest family planning clinic.
- **If you find you are having problems accessing an abortion you could phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647 for further advice.**

A Doctor will talk through with you what happens next. Abortions should be free through the NHS and are safe procedures, especially when carried out early in pregnancy, however a doctor will talk you through any possible risks. An abortion is a woman's choice and she is not required to inform her partner (if she has one). All information about abortions is kept confidential.

Cervical Cancer Screening

What is a Cervical Smear test?

A smear test is to detect any cancerous cells in the entrance to a woman's womb. This test is part of a screening programme offered to women in the UK to detect early signs of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer can be prevented if changes are found early enough. All women over the age of 20 years are offered a smear test every three years or so. This test is performed by a doctor or nurse at the GP Surgery or clinic. You can ask to see a female doctor or nurse to do this. The test is very personal and involves taking a sample

of cells from a woman's cervix. However, this test is very important and saves many lives each year.

Ways in which you can get a cervical smear are:

- To go to your GP
- To go to the nearest family planning clinic.

Female Circumcision

What is Female Circumcision?

Female Circumcision (FC), often referred to as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), is the term used to describe a variety of procedures which involve cutting (and sometimes stitching together) of the external female genitalia.

FC is generally performed on young girls for a number of reasons, for example in the name of culture, tradition or religion. It must be noted however that neither the bible, nor the Quran sanctions this act.

Where is Female Circumcision practiced?

Most girls and women who have undergone Female Circumcision live in 28 African countries, although some live in Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia) and the Middle East (Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Egypt). Female Circumcision is **NOT** practiced by the majority of the world.

What are the health complications of Female Circumcision?

FC is a centuries old practice which is deeply ingrained in to the social fabric of the communities that practice it. Indeed, it is generally an accepted and often unquestioned part of cultural life.

Female circumcision however seriously violates a number of fundamental human rights of women and girls, and can give rise to an array of physical, psychological and sexual health complications. The severity of complications varies according to the extent of cutting, the practitioner, the age at which it is performed, and in what conditions.

What are the common complications following the procedure?

Some of the complications can include:

- Severe bleeding
- Shock from bleeding or pain
- Urine retention
- Infection
- Death from shock or severe bleeding

Some of the longer term complications include:

- Infertility
- Painful periods
- Painful sexual intercourse
- Urinary infections
- Depression
- Difficulty with sexual relations

What are the complications associated with pregnancy childbirth and the postnatal period?

If unidentified, FC can have far reaching consequences in pregnancy and childbirth, which can be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of you and your child. With appropriate management many of these complications can be avoided. It is therefore extremely important to be open and honest about this practice.

When obtaining a medical history, your midwife will ask about any operations you may have had in the past. If you have been circumcised, it is important to tell your midwife. This will enable your midwife to provide culturally appropriate and effective medical and emotional care, and to devise a plan of care for your pregnancy and delivery. Your midwife may also refer you to appropriate services for treatment of any complications or for emotional support.

What is the law on Female Circumcision?

Female Circumcision is illegal in the UK; this means that it is punishable by law. A person is guilty of an offence if he/she aids, abets, counsels or procures a girl to mutilate the whole or any part of her genitalia. It is also illegal under this law to remove a girl from the country to have the procedure performed. A person found guilty of the above is liable to up to 14 years imprisonment, a monetary fine, or both

Where might I go for advice or support in relation to FGM?

There are a number of places where you can get advice and support.

- Your midwife may refer you on to a Doctor for specialist care and to develop a plan for your pregnancy and delivery.
- See your GP.

Children's Health Services

Health Visitors

What is a Health Visitor?

Health Visitors also work in GP Surgeries. They provide health information on a wide range of subjects, particularly around parenting. They are nurses who work with GPs to help keep children and their families healthy. They also provide advice about whether children are growing and developing properly. Most Health Centres and GP Surgeries have Child Health Clinics run by Health Visitors. If you have children you can normally just drop in to a child health clinic and have your child weighed or talk to the Health Visitor about any worries you have. Your Health Visitor may also visit you at home and offer support. To make an appointment with your Health Visitor you can:

- Ask the receptionist at the Health Centre or GP Surgery

School Nurses

What is a School Nurse?

School Nurses work with parents and children/young people of school age. School nurses will see children at different stages to monitor their growth and development. If you have a child entering a new school you will probably receive a form asking you to agree that the School Nurse can see them. It is important that you sign and send this form back.

Children's Immunisations

What immunisations are offered in the UK?

Many babies are offered BCG vaccine at birth to protect them against tuberculosis. When your baby is two months old you will be invited to bring them to the GP surgery or clinic for their first injections. This is to protect against; diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Hib and meningitis C. You will then be invited to come back for the same injections when your baby is 3 months then 4 months. When your child is between 13-15 months old they will be invited for the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) immunisation. Just before your child starts school, they will be invited again for booster immunisations against Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio MMR.

When your child is at school between the ages of 10 to 14 years, they will be offered BCG to protect against TB. Then between 13 to 18 years they will be offered immunisations against Diphtheria, tetanus and polio.

What do I do if my child is new to the UK and may have missed some of these immunisations?

When you are new to the UK it may be that your child needs immunisations when you arrive. This is to enable your child to catch up with what is normally given in this country. If you are new to the UK , go to your GP surgery and ask for an appointment with the practice nurse.

How do I know when to take my child for future immunisations?

For all of the immunisations given before your child starts school, you should receive a letter to your home address inviting you to your local GP surgery or clinic. If you do not receive letters about this, please tell your doctors surgery or health visitor.

Further Information on Sexual Health and HIV

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

What do I need to know about STIs

STIs are quite common and up to 1 in 10 people will have an STI at some point. If you have noticed any unusual discharge from your genitals, or any sores or pain you can be tested to see if you have an STI. Some of the more common STIs are: Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Genital Warts and Genital Herpes.

STIs can be passed on through

- Vaginal or anal sex
- Skin to skin contact of the genital area
- Oral sex
- Mother to baby during childbirth in some cases

What are the symptoms of STIs?

There are many different types of STIs and many people do not always know they have an STI, as there may be no signs or symptoms. However, if you have been experiencing any of the following symptoms, you can get free and confidential tests and treatment from specialists who work around sexual health. Some of the more common symptoms can include:

- An unusual discharge from the vagina or penis
- Sores or blisters around the genital area
- Rash or an irritation around the genital area
- Pain or burning feeling when passing urine
- Pain during sexual intercourse

Most STIs can be treated. However, if left untreated some STIs can cause long-term health problems such as infertility in men and women. Tests and treatment for STIs can be done at Sexual Health Clinics / GUM clinics.

What are the tests for STIs?

Tests will be done by a doctor or a nurse and may include a physical examination of the body and an examination of the genitals. Some tests may also require a blood or urine sample and swabs.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

Do I need to think about HIV?

If you have originated from a country in Sub-Saharan Africa or central Asia you may have been aware of people living with HIV in your community. In countries where there are high numbers of HIV positive people living, you are more likely to have been exposed to HIV, even if you have had only a small number of sexual partners.

This is because there are often no symptoms for HIV, and people can pass the virus on to others without knowing. Because of this and because people who are from areas where we know there are lots of people with HIV we encourage people to have a HIV test. This is to help prevent HIV spreading further and to provide support for people living with HIV.

How is HIV passed on?

HIV can be passed from one person to another by four main routes;

- During unprotected vaginal or anal sex
- Sharing needles with somebody else
- Blood products such as blood transfusions (in countries where blood is not screened)
- Mother to baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breast feeding the baby

HIV is not passed on through everyday social contact

There is still no cure for HIV although there are now treatments available which, if taken at the correct time, can help a person remain healthy for longer. People taking HIV treatments can live healthy active lives in the UK.

Nobody has to know that you have had a HIV test and this does not affect your asylum status.

Why should I have a HIV test?

Many people are living with HIV and do not know they have the virus. A HIV test enables you to find out if you are HIV positive or HIV negative. If you have a test, which shows you are HIV positive, you can access treatments and support to help maintain your health and access current information to avoid passing HIV onto other people. The earlier somebody knows if they are HIV positive, the more control they have over maintaining their health and staying well.

If you are from a county in Asia (such as China, Indonesia, India) or Sub Saharan Africa (such as Zimbabwe, Somalia, Botswana) where you have known people who have had HIV or died of AIDS

Or

You have been raped or have had to turn to sex work/prostitution to survive you may want to consider having a HIV test.

HIV is now a more manageable health condition and lots of support is available in the UK, which can help you live longer and stay active and well.

It is better to have a HIV test at a sexual health clinic rather than at your GP surgery as these clinics are more specialised in supporting people with HIV.

The test for HIV can be done at Sexual Health Clinics (GUM clinics) and involves taking a sample of blood to carry out the test.

Can you live well with HIV?

If you know you are HIV positive or have a HIV positive diagnosis whilst living in the UK there are a couple of things you need to think about. This may include:

- How to improve or maintain your health
- How you can make sure you do not pass HIV onto other people.
- You may also need to talk over your concerns with another person who knows about HIV. This could be a support group, a health advisor or a doctor or nurse who are specialists in HIV.

Being HIV positive does not mean that you have AIDS. You can stay healthy and well for a long time with support and access to treatments. Taking good care of your general health will give your body a better chance of fighting infection. There are special doctors or nurses who specialise in HIV who you can see who will advise you and monitor your general health.

Safer Sex

What is Safer Sex?

Safer sex means reducing the risk of acquiring HIV or STIs from sex. Condoms are promoted in the UK and are recommended when you have a new sexual partner or a partner whose sexual history/health you do not know.

What do Condoms do?

Using a condom is the most effective way to reduce the risk of transmitting many STIs and HIV. Using them correctly with a water-based lubricant will provide a good level of protection for you and your partner. Condoms need to be used correctly to be able to stop HIV and most STIs from being passed on. Condoms need to be used for vaginal, anal and oral sex to offer protection.

How do you use a condom?

If a condom is not used correctly, it could break during sex and so not protect you against HIV or STIs. To use a condom, you need to:

- Remove the condom from the packet when the penis is fully erect (be careful not to catch sharp finger nails or jewellery on the condom as this could tear it and the condom will not offer protection)
- Put the condom on the end of the erect penis
- Pinch the end of the teat of the condom to remove the air
- Unroll the condom all the way down the penis
- A water based lubricant can be put on top of the condom before the penis enters the vagina or anus
- After ejaculation withdraw the penis holding the top of the condom tightly
- Tie a knot in the condom and put it in a waste bin

A water-based lubricant is a special fluid which can be used during sex. A lubricant may need to be used to ensure the sex is not too dry as this can cause the condom to tear. A lubricant such as KY jelly is safe to use. Anything with oil in it would rot the condom and make it tear during sex. Only one condom should be used for sex and a new condom needs to be used every time you have sex. Condoms should be kept in a cool, dry place and should have an expiry date on the packet. You should only use condoms that are within the expiry date.

Female condoms are also available, which women can insert prior to sex and these can be used instead of the male condom.

Where can I get condoms from?

You can get free condoms by going to:

- Family planning clinics
- Sexual health clinics
- You can also buy condoms from supermarkets and chemists

The Law and Sexual Relationships

What is the law around Sexual Relationships?

- The law in England says that you must be over 16 years of age to have sex with a man or a woman.
- Both people must agree to have sex.
- Men and women have an equal right to choose who they have sex with and what type of sex they have.
- Any person has the right to stop the sex they are having at any time they choose.
- A person can say no to sex and this must be respected.
- Being Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender is not a crime in the UK.
- There are support groups, bars and other places where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered people can meet one another and feel safe.

Sex work (prostitution)

What support can I get if I have been involved with sex work?

If you have had to turn to sex work (often called prostitution) to survive, or have been forced to do so in the past or now, you may feel you need some support. This could be;

- For testing for STIs or HIV
- To talk to somebody about your experiences
- To access condoms to protect yourself from STIs and HIV
- To access information around benefits or other financial support available
- To access other services through the support of an advocate.
- To access information about how to keep safe when working and support with reporting any assaults to the police.

Where might I go for help or advice?

Sexual Health Clinics

What are Sexual Health Clinics? (Also called Genito-urinary Medicine G.U.M)

These are clinics that have doctors and nurses that are specially trained to test, diagnose and treat STIs and HIV. If you are concerned that you may have been exposed to an STI or HIV you can have tests and access treatments at these clinics. This service is free and confidential. You can also get advice and information about contraception, emergency contraception, condoms and HIV. The clinics are usually in a hospital and you may hear them called STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease) clinics, GUM clinics, or special clinics.

How do you access the Clinic?

Most clinics use an appointments system. Male and female doctors work at these clinics. If you specifically want to see a male or female doctor you must ask for one when booking the appointment. Clinic times vary between Monday to Friday daytime. They are closed bank holidays.

Patients can be seen without needing to attend the GP, and most people do this. They do not have to tell anybody else they are going to the clinic and the clinic will not tell the GP or their sexual partners if they attend. However, if you do need help to make an appointment at the clinic, your GP can make an appointment for you.

Before you go

If you've not been to the clinic before, it might help you to know what happens. Some things may be different from clinic to clinic but this will give you a rough idea.

Things you need to know

- Women will have a female nurse with them all the time during examination if the Doctor is male
- Your visit is kept confidential
- **Do not** pass urine (empty your bladder) for 2 hours before the appointment
- Take any medication with you or write down the name of any medication you are on
- Leave at least 2 hours for your first appointment at the clinic
- Write down your name, date of birth, address and telephone number. Also write down your GP's name and address as you will be asked for this information each time you visit
- Take your hand held record (blue book) with you, if you have one
- Keep your bus ticket and ask for your public transport money back

Have you left enough time?

It could take up to two hours to see a doctor, have tests done, get the results, be treated and talk to a health adviser.

Who'll know if I've been to a clinic?

All information is confidential. You will be asked for your permission for the clinic to write to your GP, only if you have been referred by your GP in the first place. Otherwise, the information will not be sent anywhere else.

What sexual health clinics can do for you.

At clinics you should be able to get for free:

- Information and advice about having a healthy sex life
- Tests and treatments for sexually transmitted infections
- Someone to chat to about anything relating to your sexual health
- Vaccinations against hepatitis A and B
- HIV tests – and counselling before the test and afterwards
- Sexual health check-ups
- Condoms and water based lubricants
- Emergency contraception
- Pregnancy tests

You and your Health Adviser

Most clinics have Health Advisers or Counsellors. They have experience of a wide range of problems. You can talk about:

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Rape or sexual assault (recently or in the past) or violence in the relationship
- HIV testing
- Loss of sex drive or problems getting erections
- Relationships where one of you has HIV and the other doesn't
- Living with HIV
- Choices around HIV treatments or problems taking treatments
- Things on your mind about your sex life or relationship
- Ways of telling your sexual partners they may have an infection and need a check up
- Concerns about attending the clinic, communication, transport, confidentiality

Seeing a Health Adviser

It's best to ask for an appointment. You can ask to see someone without an appointment if you don't mind waiting. You can speak to a Health Adviser over the phone. Health Advisers can see couples that want to talk things through together. Or you can take along

a friend for support. But before seeing both of you, the Health Adviser will usually want to see you briefly on your own first.

If the clinic finds you have an infection, you may be asked to see the Health Adviser. This is so that you can talk about what the infection is and how it's treated. You can also discuss how you got it and how to avoid getting it again, as well as what it means for other people you have sex with. You can talk about different ways your sexual partners can be advised to have a check-up.

Your personal details

You need to give the same name, address and date of birth at each visit. Let reception know if any details have changed e.g. your address.

Seeing the doctor

When seeing the doctor these are the kind of questions you could be asked:

- When did you last have sex?
- Was it with a man or a woman or more than one person?
- Have you been raped or sexually assaulted?
- If you think you have an infection, what symptoms have you had and when did you first notice them?
- What medicines are you taking at the moment?
- Have you had any sexually transmitted infections before?
- Do you have any health problems generally?

Being examined

The doctor will ask you to undress so she/he can look for any signs of infection. The doctor may feel the glands in your groin or neck to check for swelling. The doctor will then tell you what tests they want you to have. The doctor or a nurse should do the tests and explain what each test is for. If you are a woman a female nurse will always be in the room if a male doctor is examining you.

Tests

A number of tests are offered to everybody who goes to the clinic. Tests are done through blood tests, urine tests or swabs taken from the penis, vagina or rectum. **You do not have to have all the tests. If you feel uncomfortable or unsure about any of these talk it through with the doctor/nurse or health adviser.**

Results

How you receive your results will be discussed with you before you leave.

Treatments / Medicines

It's important to take any medicines exactly as prescribed at the clinic. **It's very important to finish the whole course of tablets - even if the symptoms go away.**

Telling others

The clinic may suggest getting in touch with people you've had sex with since being infected. This will be discussed with you at the clinic.

Confidentiality

Any information a clinic has about you must stay confidential by law. Your medical records and test results should stay within the sexual health clinic and not go to other parts of the hospital without your permission.