

MEN'S HEALTH FORUM

News Release

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New Chlamydia Study Encourages Men To Seek Screening

A call for more men to be screened for chlamydia comes today from the Men's Health Forum.

The Forum says that in the two years since it was set up, the National Chlamydia Screening Programme has screened fourteen times as many women as men – yet it is known that men and women carry the chlamydia infection in equal numbers and most women are infected by sexual contact with men.

Today the Forum publishes a new study showing how to get more men to volunteer for chlamydia testing. Success was achieved by a combination of factors, including partnership between the NHS and local communities, male-friendly promotional materials, free self-test kits and the availability of treatment at local pharmacies. The Forum believes that the results of the two-year project could point the way to persuading men to take their health more seriously, so improving the health of women as well.

In an unusual approach, the Men's Health Forum project focused on the workplace to target 4,000 men. The aim was to increase men's awareness of chlamydia, to promote the adoption of safer sexual practices, particularly among young men, and to encourage men to seek screening and treatment where appropriate.

In partnership with the local Primary Care Trust, the Forum provided urine testing kits and health promotion literature in six work places in Telford, Shropshire and men were invited to return their urine samples to a local laboratory. Those men testing positive were then invited to visit their general practitioner, their local genito urinary clinic or to go to their pharmacist to get a one-off course of antibiotics.

Of the 400 people who took the opportunity to take the chlamydia test, almost 80 per cent were male. Almost one in ten of the total target audience of men aged under 30 chose to take up the offer of screening and of those over three per cent tested positive for chlamydia. The majority of those who tested positive preferred to seek treatment at a pharmacy rather than go to their GP or a GUM clinic.

David Wilkins, Policy Officer of the Men's Health Forum, said that pharmacists treating chlamydia without first seeing their GP or visiting a GUM clinic was a groundbreaking development.

'We undertook this study because of our concern that the focus of almost all national planning and investment was on advising, educating and screening women. That approach seemed short-sighted. In order effectively to improve the health of all – but of women most particularly – we must find ways of encouraging men to take their sexual health more seriously and to change their behaviour. Encouraging men to take up chlamydia screening is a vital part of that.'

He said that the results of this study demonstrated again just how difficult it was to persuade men to take control of their own sexual health – but it was not impossible. Communicating with men in their work place was one important approach and in this study a small but significant number of men discovered that they were suffering from chlamydia.

'We believe that both national and local health policies must take a more sophisticated approach to communicating with men. These results indicate that the more streamlined the screening and treatment process the more successful it is likely to be for men, particularly young men'.

The project was funded jointly by the Department of Health, the National Pharmaceutical Association, which represents the majority of community pharmacy owners in the UK, and Roche Diagnostics, who manufacture the urine-testing machine.

Dr Ian Banks, President of the Men's Health Forum, said: 'The Department of Health has been instrumental in establishing this project and we look forward to further partnerships addressing the health needs of men.'

Colette McCreedy, Director of Pharmacy Practice at the National Pharmaceutical Association, said: 'This project shows the key role that local pharmacists can have in tackling the problem of men's health. It points the way to the involvement of local pharmacists in the delivery of other services that hitherto required people to make appointments and attend medical settings.'

Telford and Wrekin Primary Care Trust played a major role in the project and the urine specimens were processed at the microbiology laboratory at the Princess Royal Hospital, Telford. Drs Sue Robin and Sarah Feather of the PCT said, 'Hopefully other PCTs will look at the outcome of this study and begin to tailor their health policies accordingly. PCTs have to recognize that in order to stem the national rise in numbers of people with chlamydia infection, they have to use strategies which target men as well as women.'

Paul Weinberger, Director of Business Development for Roche Diagnostics, said: 'The availability of the urine test in this project was key to reaching young men, showing them that simply peeing in a pot is all it takes. This message of easy and painless chlamydia testing is vital in encouraging young men to take responsibility for their own sexual health and that of their partners.'

The full report can be downloaded from:
<http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/chlamydia/>

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Note to editors: According to the National Chlamydia Screening Programme – Annual Report 2003/2004, p 28 Table 5. 16,413 women have been screened in comparison to 1,172 men.

Genital chlamydial infection is a sexually transmitted infection transmitted from the infected partner to the uninfected partner during unprotected sex. In at least 50 per cent of cases in men and 70 per cent of cases in women, chlamydia has no symptoms. Chlamydia is easily and effectively treated by antibiotics. But if untreated it can lead to infertility in men and women. Chlamydia is currently the most common sexually transmitted infection diagnosed at genito-urinary medicine clinics in the UK and diagnoses have been rising steadily since the 1990s. In 2003, approximately 40,000 cases were diagnosed in men and approximately 50,000 cases in women.

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