

## **Minister Harris launches national condom distribution service in third level colleges**

### **HSE to make condoms and sexual health information freely available to third level students nationally**

Today, Tuesday, November 5<sup>th</sup> 2019, the Minister for Health launched the roll-out of the National Condom Distribution Service (NCDS) in third level settings, in Trinity College, Dublin.

From today, third-level institutions can order free condom dispensers from the HSE, which will enable the provision of free condoms and sexual health information to students on campuses nationwide. Information leaflets will be made available with the condom dispensers, which will outline to students how to use condoms correctly, and will emphasise the importance of using condoms consistently and every time sex happens. The information leaflets will direct students to HSE-led and HSE-funded websites for further information about sexual health and wellbeing; [www.sexualwellbeing.ie](http://www.sexualwellbeing.ie) and [www.man2man.ie](http://www.man2man.ie).

Speaking ahead of the launch, the Minister for Health, Simon Harris said "Sexual health is a priority for my Department. In recent months, we have made significant policy decisions in this regard. We have published the working group report on access to contraception, we started rolling out PrEP this week and we are reviewing our sexual health strategy next year. It is essential we continue to make improvements in sexual education and remove barriers to contraception. This will reduce crisis pregnancies and reduce the rates of sexually transmitted infections."

He continued "Today's announcement marks a new milestone in helping us to meet those goals. I want to thank everyone from the HSE, and the staff and students of the third level institutions who have worked so hard to put this great initiative in place. This partnership approach is key to supporting healthier communities in our third-level campuses."

The Minister of State for Health Promotion Catherine Byrne said, "I am delighted to welcome and support this important initiative. Young people between the ages of 18 and 30 are a key risk group for unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. It is essential that we do everything we can to assist and equip our young people to avoid these risks. A key part of this initiative is the provision of leaflets with information on safer sex and consent. We have some great websites and information campaigns running such as the [#RespectProtect](https://www.respectprotect.ie) campaign and the [sexualwellbeing.ie](http://www.sexualwellbeing.ie) and [man2man.ie](http://www.man2man.ie) websites, and I urge all young people to use these trusted resources. I'm delighted with the partnership approach we are taking with the third-level campuses and students, and we will build on this to support a broader Healthy Ireland Healthy Campus initiative across more health and wellbeing issues."

Helen Deely, Acting Assistant National Director for HSE Health and Wellbeing said, "Using condoms correctly and every time sex occurs reduces the risk of a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. STI diagnoses have been increasing among young adults in recent years [note 6]. In the past, some young adults reported having sex without a condom because of the cost associated with buying condoms [note 7]; others reported having sex without a condom because they did not have access to

one at the time sex happened [note 8]. This scheme is about increasing opportunities for young people in third-level settings to make safer-sex choices if they are sexually active”

She continued “We are really pleased that third-level colleges across the country have responded positively to engaging with this scheme; and support our endeavour to increase consistent condom use among young people. Further initiatives to expand access to condoms and sexual health information to young people in other settings will be progressed as part of the on-going implementation of the National Sexual Health Strategy”

Róisín O’Donovan, USI Vice President for Welfare said, “We are delighted to support the launch of the national condom distribution service in third level institutions today. Through this initiative, we hope to see an increase in awareness of the importance of using condoms to prevent STI’s and unplanned pregnancies amongst students. Alongside the condom distribution service, we will continue to provide educational and campaign messaging to students on sexual health in partnership with the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme. We encourage students to use the service, plan ahead and carry condoms if they are sexually active.”

Notes to editors:

1. The Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) is a national policy priority programme in Health and Wellbeing in the HSE. It is charged with the implementation of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020.
2. The National Condom Distribution Service was established in October 2015 by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, functions as a central point for distributing free condoms and lubricant sachets to HSE services and organisations who work directly with people at an increased risk of negative sexual health outcomes.
3. For more information on the National Condom Distribution Service visit <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/national-condom-distribution-service/>
4. In 2018, 409,000 condoms were ordered by 67 organisations working directly with individuals and groups across the country who are at increased risk of unplanned pregnancy, or acquiring HIV or an STI. For the full 2018 NCDS report please visit: <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/ncds-2018-final.pdf>
5. To download the HSE information leaflet ‘How to use a condom’ click here <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/contraception/your-choices/condoms/male-external-condom.html>
6. Between 2015 and 2018, among 15 – 24 year olds, the number of herpes diagnoses increased by 22%; the number of chlamydia cases increased by 14% and the number of gonorrhoea cases increased by 33%. In 2018, the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre reported that in 2017, 15 to 24 year olds made up 50% of all chlamydia cases reported; 39% of all gonorrhoea cases reported and 38% of all genital herpes cases report. <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/>  
<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/2015reports/File,15872,en.pdf>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/2016reports/STI%20Data%20Tables,%202016.pdf>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/2017reports/STI%20annual%20data%20tables%202017.pdf>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/2018reports/STI%20annual%20data%20tables%202018%20v1.pdf>

7. The Irish Contraception and Crisis Pregnancy Study 2010 found that 10% of men and 7% of women aged 18 to 25 indicated that they had had sex in the last year without a condom because of the cost of condoms:  
[https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/iccp-2010\\_report.pdf](https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/iccp-2010_report.pdf)
8. The European Men Who Have Sex with Men Internet Survey 2017 Ireland found that 27% of men had reported sex without a condom because they did not have access to a condom <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/emis-final.pdf>
9. For more information on sexual health and wellbeing visit [www.sexualwellbeing.ie](http://www.sexualwellbeing.ie) and [www.man2man.ie](http://www.man2man.ie)

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