

## **HSE and Irish Pharmacy Union launch new campaign 'Play it Safe!'**

- ***New campaign encourages young adults to consider their sexual health and wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic.***

The HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP), HSE Health and Wellbeing, is launching a new sexual health campaign in partnership with the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) today, Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

The aim of the campaign is to provide young adults with access to helpful information to support them in safeguarding their sexual health and wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic. The campaign involves making sexual health protection packs available in pharmacies nationwide, which include an information leaflet and a free HSE condom.

The leaflet contains information on how to reduce the risk of coronavirus if sexually active and when to consider avoiding sex; contraception, emergency hormonal contraception and condoms; STI testing; PrEP and PEP; and the importance of sexual consent. The leaflet directs people to [www.sexualwellbeing.ie](http://www.sexualwellbeing.ie) for further information, and advises that they speak to their pharmacist if they have any queries about their sexual health. The campaign is supported by social media messages.

Minister of State for Public Health and Wellbeing, Frank Feighan TD said “The lives of young adults have been particularly disrupted in recent months, and as we all learn to live safely with Covid-19, it is important that people continue to access information and supports to safeguard their sexual health and wellbeing. I am delighted to see the collaboration between the HSE and the IPU, making information readily accessible through pharmacies all over the country. So I encourage everyone, especially young people, to drop into your local pharmacy and pick up a sexual health protection pack, and also visit [www.sexualwellbeing.ie](http://www.sexualwellbeing.ie) for lots of useful information about all aspects of sexual health and wellbeing.”

Maeve O'Brien, Interim Programme Lead, SHCPP, said “Coronavirus has changed many aspects of our lives and, although sexual health may not be a primary healthcare focus in the current environment, it is very important that people continue to have access to accurate and trustworthy information to inform sexual health decision-making. We know from public health data and research that young adults in

particular are more affected by crisis pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections [1][2] so this campaign aims to support their sexual health and wellbeing.”

Speaking ahead of the launch Darragh O’Loughlin, IPU Secretary General, said “Pharmacies are an important frontline point of contact for the public and a place where people can get accurate information about the management of their healthcare, and prevention and treatment of illness. The convenience and accessibility offered by community pharmacies is hugely valuable in helping to provide sexual health information and supports. Over a third of 18-30 year olds named pharmacies as somewhere they would like to receive sexual health information, according to research carried out in December 2019. Thus pharmacies are ideally placed in the community to support this campaign”.

For more information on sexual health and coronavirus visit [www.sexualwellbeing.ie](http://www.sexualwellbeing.ie)

Ends

Note 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 SHCPP National Condom Distribution Service, which provides condoms to organisations working with at-risk groups, has had significantly fewer orders over the past few months, due to venue and office closures.
3. The National Condom Distribution Service was established in October 2015 by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, and 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. For more information on the National Condom Distribution Service visit <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/national-condom-distribution-service/>. 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.
4. Currently there are restrictions to public STI services because of the coronavirus situation. Find out more about these restrictions here: <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sex-and-coronavirus/>

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1.<sup>1</sup> McBride et al. Irish Contraception and Crisis Pregnancy Study 2010 (ICCP-2010). 2012. [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)

2. HPSC. STI Notifications Ireland 2018, Data Tables. 2019. <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/2018reports/STI%20annual%20data%20tables%202018%20v1.pdf>

5. In May 2020, the IPU reported a 10% reduction in the number of oral contraception prescriptions being dispensed compared to the same time last year, including emergency hormonal contraception, suggesting that women were not fulfilling their contraception prescriptions. For more information, see <https://ipu.ie/home/article/10-fall-off-in-prescriptions-for-the-pill-during-covid-19-crisis/>
6. For further information on your sexual health and coronavirus please visit <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sex-and-coronavirus/>

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