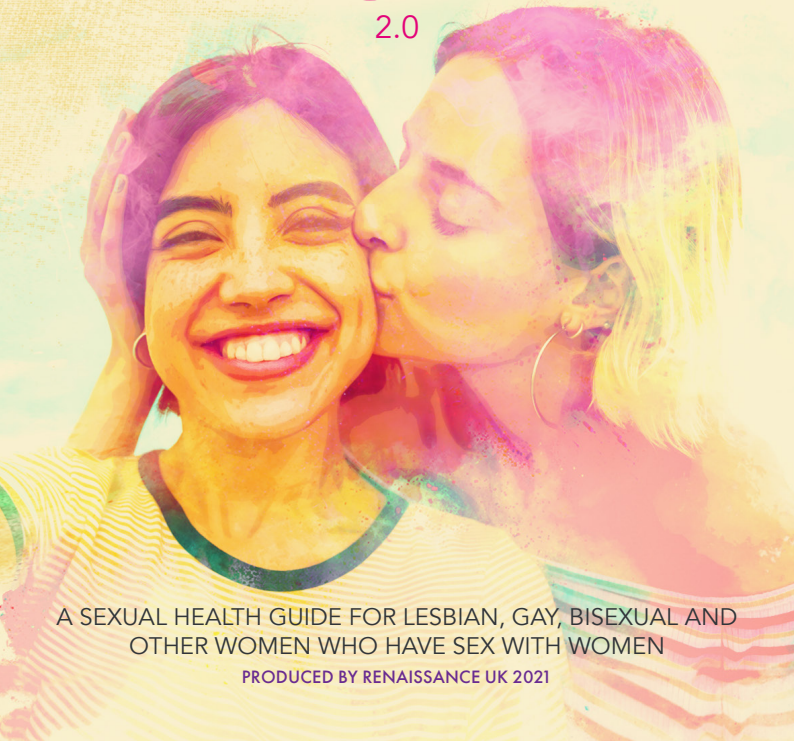




I KISSED A GIRL

2.0



A SEXUAL HEALTH GUIDE FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND
OTHER WOMEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH WOMEN

PRODUCED BY RENAISSANCE UK 2021

I KISSED A GIRL 2.0

We are so often asked why there is very little sexual health information available for women. In response to this, we released the first “I Kissed a Girl” booklet back in 2017, through the Blackpool Sexual Health Service, HORIZON LGBTQ+. We are now launching a fully updated version, this time, through our governing Charity, Renaissance UK. To ensure the information is available across all projects delivered by the service.

In this guide we hope to answer some of the questions that you may have regarding sexual health and other health areas that you may be concerned about.

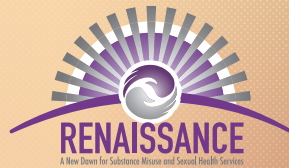
Renaissance UK, formerly known as Drugline Lancashire, is a Harm Reduction Charity that has been supporting the community across Lancashire since 1986. Drugline was set up to support the rise in recreational drug use throughout the country. Since its inception, funding streams have changed, and projects have evolved. In 2011 more work was being completed in Sexual Health and Drugline chose to rebrand to become Renaissance at Drugline Lancs. Then in 2018 we became Renaissance UK. Throughout the years the organisation has always supported the LGBTQ+ community through projects such as SHIVER and Healthier Living. In 2014 the Blackpool HORIZON Partnership was formed and LGBTQ+ Community Development sat within

this new Sexual Health and Drug and Alcohol Support system in Blackpool.

Renaissance UK now delivers Sexual Health Support to those most at risk in Blackpool, including support for those living with and affected by HIV, those working in the Sex Industry and the LGBTQ+ community.

Across Lancashire, Renaissance UK delivers “Healthier Living” – support for those living with and affected by HIV, along with community based Sexual Health Outreach. We also deliver this project in Blackburn with Darwen.

Renaissance UK has been a leader in Sexual Health Harm Reduction and HIV Testing and Awareness for many years. More of our great work can be found on our website at Ren-UK.com



ABBREVIATIONS TO NOTE

- LB:** Lesbian and Bisexual | **WSW:** Women who have sex with Women
LBWSW: Lesbian and bisexual women and other women who have sex with women
STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection



SEXUAL HEALTH



IS MY VAGINA NORMAL?

Vaginas are designed to help us have and enjoy sex, have periods and have babies. But what's normal and what's not?

Dr Suzy Elneil, consultant in urogynaecology and uro-neurology at University College Hospital, London, has worked with a lot of women. "Like people, vaginas are completely individual," she says. "No two are the same."

Don't compare yourself to anyone else — what someone else's vagina looks like is normal for them but won't necessarily be what's normal for you. Yours is unique.

THE VAGINA AND VULVA

Some of a woman's sexual organs are inside the body,

such as the womb, ovaries and vagina, and some are outside.

The external organs are known as the vulva. This includes the opening of the vagina, the inner and outer lips (labia) and the clitoris, which is located at the top of the vagina.

The vagina is a tube about 8cm (3in) long, which leads from the cervix (the neck of the womb) down to the vulva, where it opens between the legs.

"Vaginas vary in shape, size and colour," says Dr Elneil. "Some are small and ovoid [egg-shaped], some are large and cylindrical, and the colours can vary from light pink to a deep brownish red-pink. The important thing is that the vagina functions normally."

Pelvic floor exercises can help keep your vagina in

shape. "These are good for maintaining good pelvic floor tone and can improve sexual function," she adds.

"Normal exercise also helps maintain good vaginal function, as walking and running helps the pelvic floor tone up and helps ensure good general health."

SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT THE SIZE OF MY LABIA?

Some women worry about the size of their labia (the lips outside the vagina), but there isn't usually any cause for concern. Labia vary from woman to woman, so don't judge yours by anyone else's standards.

Large labia are only a medical problem if it affects your working, social or sporting life. If you feel that these are affected, then talk to your GP

VAGINAL DISCHARGE

It is normal to have some vaginal discharge (mucus or secretions), and the texture and amount of discharge can vary throughout your menstrual cycle.

If your normal vaginal discharge becomes different — for example, it changes colour or smells — this could be a sign of infection, so again, see your GP or sexual health clinic if you prefer.

VAGINAL ITCHING

A healthy vagina shouldn't be itchy. Itching can be a sign of thrush or another infection, but it can also have other causes. If the itching persists for more than a month, get it checked by a GP or gynaecologist. They need to see the vulva, perineum [between the vagina and anus] and the vagina directly."

IT'S THAT TIME OF THE MONTH



PROBLEMS...? PERIOD.

Most women have a regular menstrual cycle that's around 28 days long (28 days from the start of one period to the start of the next), and they bleed for three to seven days each cycle. However, some women experience problems with their periods.

If problems with your periods are affecting your life, there's help and support available. Find out how to treat painful periods, heavy periods, PMS, ovulation pain and what to do if you're not having periods, at the NHS Website www.nhs.uk/livewell/menstrualcycle

Before you see a clinician about period problems, it can be useful to keep a diary of your symptoms throughout the menstrual cycle. This can give your clinician a detailed idea of what happens, and when, during your cycle.

WHEN WAS YOUR LAST MOT?

Many people with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) don't get symptoms, so it's worth getting tested even if you feel fine. If you think you have an STI, the earlier you're tested, the sooner treatment can be given if it's needed.

An STI can be passed from one person to another through sexual contact, including vaginal, anal and oral sex. You can get or pass on an STI whoever you're having sex with.

Women who have sex with other women can pass on or get STIs.

KNOW HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF.

LBWSW are not immune from sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and it's important not to be complacent about getting tested for them.

Sometimes, LBWSW don't think they need to be tested for STIs. This is not the case.

A survey of lesbian and bisexual women by LGBT Charity Stonewall, revealed half of those who had been screened, had an active infection.

Women can catch STIs such as Herpes, Genital Warts and Chlamydia when exchanging bodily fluids. Any one-on-one contact, such as oral sex or using the same hand when touching yourself and then your partner, can put you at risk. Two women that are both menstruating are at a higher risk, too.

TIPS FOR SAFER SEX BETWEEN WOMEN

If you're using sex toys, use a new condom for each partner, or between penetration of different orifices (body openings). Sex toys should be washed with soap and water between sessions. Most sex toys will have cleaning instructions with them when purchased. Take note of these instructions and also check for scratches or breaks where germs can be present and spread.

Avoid oral sex if either of you have any cuts or sores in the mouth or on the lips, or use a dental dam. A dental dam is a latex or polyurethane (very thin, soft plastic) square, of about 15cm by 15cm, which you can use to cover the anus or genitals during oral sex. It acts as a barrier to help prevent sexually transmitted infections passing from one person to another. Dental Dams are available free of charge and on request from Renaissance UK.

Some infections can be transmitted by hands, fingers and mutual vulval rubbing. Wash your hands before and after sex.

Wear latex gloves and use plenty of water-based lubricant for vaginal and anal fisting.

TIPS FOR BISEXUAL WOMEN ON SAFER SEX WITH MEN (OR SOMEONE WITH A PENIS)

If you have vaginal, anal or oral sex with a man or someone with a penis, use a condom. When used correctly, condoms protect against unintended

pregnancy, HIV and other STIs. In addition to using condoms, find out about the form of contraception that suits you best. Speak to a clinician at a Sexual Health Clinic or at your medical centre. Pill form contraception is also now available over the counter at some pharmacies. But it is a good idea to speak to a clinician or pharmacist, before purchasing these.

Free condoms are available from Renaissance UK and from your local Sexual Health Service. Visit www.Ren-UK.com for more information on condom distribution and our FREE postal service.

If you think you could be at risk of unintended pregnancy, you have the option of using emergency contraception, which might involve a tablet or insertion of an IUD (coil).

The emergency pill is available from some pharmacies, GPs, contraception (family planning) clinics and some Sexual Health Clinics. The IUD is available from contraception clinics, Some Sexual Health clinics and some GPs.



SYMPTOMS OF STIS IN WOMEN

It is important that you remember, all STI's can be present without any symptoms showing. We recommend that if you are changing partners regularly and/or engaging in sexual activity with partners that you are not always familiar with, that you get a full STI Screen at your local Sexual Health Clinic or through a local digital postal service, every 3 to 6 months. It's also good to remember that most STI's can be present without any physical symptoms.

THRUSH

Thrush is caused by an overgrowth of yeast called Candida. Symptoms may include vulval and vaginal itching, pain and soreness on penetration, burning when passing urine, and a thick, white discharge.

It's possible for women to transmit thrush during sex through touching and sharing sex toys. Thrush can be treated with medicated cream, pessaries and tablets, which can be bought over the counter from a chemist or Pharmacy and some supermarkets.

Contact your medical centre if your symptoms persist.

GENITAL HERPES

This is caused by a virus, which can spread if you have vaginal, anal or oral sex, or share sex toys. It can also cause cold sores on the mouth and nose.

Symptoms include painful blisters and ulcers around the genital area, although some women may have no symptoms.

Antiviral tablets can help the healing process however these are only available on prescription so you will need to speak to either your Medical Centre or Sexual

Health Services.

GENITAL WARTS

These are fleshy growths in the vulval and anal region. They may be itchy but are usually painless.

They are caused by certain strains of the human papilloma virus (HPV), which are usually sexually acquired through skin contact, such as rubbing vulvas together.

Women with genital warts do not need more regular smear tests than those without them. There are a variety of treatment options, including freezing and medicated creams. If you are concerned about Genital Warts, speak to your Medical Centre or NHS Sexual Health Service.

TRICHOMONIASIS

Trichomoniasis is a parasitic infection which can be passed between women during any sexual activity that involves the exchange of vaginal fluid.

Symptoms include a frothy discharge, discomfort when passing urine, vulval soreness, and sometimes an unpleasant vaginal odour. Some women don't have any symptoms. It is treated with antibiotics from your Sexual Health Clinic.

CHLAMYDIA AND GONORRHOEA

These STIs are caused by bacteria, which can infect the cervix, rectum, throat and urethra. There may be a discharge, but usually there are no symptoms.

Oral and anal Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea, can be

different to vaginal, so you must be clear when speaking to a clinician about the sex that you have had, so that they can give you the best treatment. If you are not clear, then things can be missed and reinfection is highly possible.

If the conditions are not treated, the bacteria may lead to an infection in the fallopian tubes and infertility.

Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea can be passed between women through shared sex toys, hands, and by rubbing vulvas together. Treatment is with antibiotics from a Sexual Health Clinic.

SYPHILIS

Syphilis is a bacterial infection that causes a painless ulcer, usually in the genital area. The ulcer will disappear on its own, but other symptoms may appear, and the infection is still active. Other symptoms can include a rash on the body and swollen glands.

If it is not treated, Syphilis can cause serious nerve and body organ damage later in life.

In its early stages, Syphilis is extremely infectious and can be passed on by close skin contact during sex. Treatment is with antibiotic injections or tablets from a Sexual Health Clinic.

HIV

Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV, is a virus that attacks the immune system and weakens your ability to fight infections and disease. It is most commonly caught by having vaginal or anal sex without using a condom. HIV can also be passed by sharing needles.

There is no cure for HIV, but treatments are available to manage the condition and enable most people to live a long and normal life.

AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection when your body can no longer fight life-threatening infections. With early diagnosis and effective treatment, most people with HIV will not go on to develop AIDS.

The best way to protect yourself from contracting HIV is by using condoms for all penetrative sex. It is possible to spread the virus through oral sex and sharing sex toys, although the chances of this happening are very low. It is estimated you have a 1 in 5,000 chance of contracting the virus if you give oral sex to someone that is already infected and not on medication.

HIV is changing all the time, please read more info on Treatment as Prevention, PEP and PrEP further on in this guide

HIV – KNOW YOUR STATUS

It has never been more important to know your HIV status and it has never been simpler to get tested. Approximately 105,200 people are living with HIV in the UK according to Public Health England. Women account for around 1 third of all those currently living with HIV in England, and 27.5% of all new diagnoses in 2019.

It is still estimated that around 6,312 people in the UK remain undiagnosed. (Have not been tested) reasons for this are that HIV can be present in the body for years without showing any sign of symptoms.

It is suggested anyone that is sexually active, should present for an HIV test annually. We at Renaissance UK recommend that if you change sexual partners regularly you should get tested every 3 to 6 months. You can get tested for HIV FREE of charge at your local sexual health clinic, at Renaissance UK and you can now also test yourself at home FREE by visiting www.freetesting.hiv

The best way to prevent contracting HIV, is to use a condom for penetrative sex. Not only will this protect you from HIV, but also all other sexually transmitted Infections. However, there are also other ways to prevent HIV that can be used in addition to condoms.

PEPSE OR PEP - POST EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEPSE)

If you believe that you have come into contact with the HIV virus, either by engaging in penetrative sex without a condom, sharing a sex toy, sharing injecting drug equipment or for any other reason when you feel that you may have been exposed to the virus, then you can call 111 or present at your nearest Sexual Health Clinic or at Accident and Emergency at any hospital to talk about PEPSE or PeP.

PEPSE and PeP is a 1-month course of high strength anti-retroviral medication that can, if taken properly, suppress the HIV virus before it develops in your body and therefore stop you contracting the virus.

PEPSE/PeP can only be taken however, up to 72 hours after exposure, clinicians prefer you to begin the course within 24 hours. There is a lot of bad press out there that talks about horrific side effects from taking PEPSE and PeP. As with all medication some

people can experience side effects however, the side effects these days from a course of PEPSE or PeP are minimal, and you will receive support and medical assistance while you are taking the course both during and afterwards.

Remember — You must access PEPSE or PeP within 72 Hours of exposure (preferable 24 hours) and if the Sexual Health Clinic is not open you can get PeP and PEPSE from Accident and Emergency at the hospital. DO NOT LEAVE WITHOUT IT!

TREATMENT AS PREVENTION.

If you receive a positive diagnosis of HIV, the chances are you will be prescribed anti-retroviral treatment from a clinician. When taken effectively, these drugs can lower the amount of HIV Virus in your body to what is called an Undetectable Status. With careful monitoring and an effective administration of this medication, an undetectable status can be achieved. This means that the virus is suppressed enough that there is no risk of passing HIV on to anyone else. At present there is still no cure for HIV, but with an undetectable status you are dramatically reducing the risk of any sexual partners contracting the virus.

PREP FOR WOMEN – (PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS)

PrEP is a pill that protects you from HIV. It is a course of tablets that you take before and after sex. PrEP is formulated to be taken by someone that is negative of HIV before exposure can occur and it is advised to be taken at least 1 week before it can become effective.

People that would benefit from taking PrEP are those that are HIV Negative, want to protect themselves

from HIV, and potentially have sex in a variety of situations where condoms are not easily or always used.

PrEP is provided for free as part of NHS Sexual Health Services. If you cannot access free NHS PrEP from a Sexual Health Clinic, then you can buy it privately, though it is still important to have your baseline blood tests for HIV and Kidney Function and to have regular HIV and STI monitoring every three months. This is all provided for Free though NHS Sexual Health Clinics for both private and NHS PrEP users. More info on PrEP can be found at www.womenandprep.org.uk/ www.IWantPrEPNow.co.uk & www.i-base.info/prep-for-women

PLEASE REMEMBER — Although PrEP is proven to dramatically reduce the risk of contracting the HIV virus, it in no way protects you from any other Sexually Transmitted Infection or Blood Borne Virus (BBV). The only way to reduce the risk of all STI's and BBV's while having sex is to use a condom.

KEEPING YOUR VAGINA HEALTHY

The vagina is self-cleansing, so there's no need to wash inside it (douching). Vaginal soreness and vulval irritation can be caused by overuse of perfumed soaps, bubble baths and shower gels.

After going to the toilet, always wipe from front to back (from vagina to anus).

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR ABOUT SEXUAL HEALTH

If you have any of the symptoms outlined in this guide, or are worried you may have an STI, speak to your GP, medical centre or visit an NHS Sexual Health Clinic.

Getting tested regularly is a good idea to ensure you have a healthy sex life and remember that NHS services are Free of Charge.

CERVICAL SCREENING (SMEAR TEST)

Some women believe, that if they are not having sex with male partners, they do not need to have cervical screening. This is very much NOT the case. If you have a cervix then you should be screened.

The aim of the NHS Cervical Screening Programme is to reduce the number of women who develop cervical cancer and the number of women who die from the condition. Since the screening programme was introduced in the 1980s, the number of cervical cancer cases has decreased by about 7% each year.

All women who are registered with a GP are invited for cervical screening:

- Aged 25 to 49 — every three years
- Aged 50 to 64 — every five years
- Over 65 — only women who haven't been screened since age 50 or those who have recently had abnormal tests

Being screened regularly means any abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix can be identified at an early stage and, if necessary, treated to stop cancer developing.

The way to remember, however you identify your gender or sexuality is:

“If you have a Cervix — Get a Screen, If you have a Prostate get a Check”



FIND OUT MORE

Your sexual health is your responsibility so look after yourself, find out more and get to know your body.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Renaissance UK 01253 311431 www.Ren-UK.com

Blackpool and Lancashire Sexual Health Services 0300 1234 154 www.lancashiresexualhealth.nhs.uk

Brook – Sexual Health Services Blackburn with Darwen

01254 268 700 www.sexualhealthblackburn.co.uk

NHS Direct 111

More information can be found at

www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health and our website www.Ren-UK.com

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