

Welcome to the tenth edition of *DASH!*

This edition features sexual health and support services for Northern Ireland's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. It focuses on:

- services provided by the Rainbow Project
- information about the HIV Rapid Testing Service
- information about post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and the Rainbow Project's research.

Also included in this edition is a short summary of the 16th Annual Regional Sexual Health Conference that took place in November 2010.

FPA is contracted by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) to write and produce *DASH*. Showcase your project, publicise an event or comment on this edition by contacting the editor, Grace Keery, on tel: 028 90 316116 or email: graceg@fpa.org.uk.

The Rainbow Project

The Rainbow Project is Northern Ireland's largest LGBT support group and delivers Northern Ireland's only sexual health service which specifically targets gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with men. It has offices in Belfast and Derry and provides:

- free safer sex materials
- information and advice
- rapid HIV testing
- a peripatetic counselling service
- monthly sexual health clinics
- a support group for parents of LGBT young people
- personal development programmes
- advocacy support for LGBT people who wish to access statutory services including those experiencing inequality in employment or housing and victims of homophobic hate crime, sexual violence and domestic violence.

The project also campaigns, lobbies on and researches issues of inequality and human rights.

To find out more about the Rainbow Project, visit www.rainbow-project.org.

The project's HIV rapid testing service

In their premises in Belfast, the Rainbow Project offers a rapid testing service to individuals at risk of HIV. The appointment takes around one hour and includes a test and an opportunity for clients to discuss their sexual health and wellbeing with a trained member of staff. Pre-test discussions include risk of contracting HIV, sexual history and risk assessment. Following the test the client is informed about safer sex, PEP and other services available at Rainbow. Every person who comes for an HIV test is encouraged to attend a genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic for a full sexual health screen.

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The Rainbow Project

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Following the test and discussion, the client is given the result of the test straightaway. If the result is non-reactive the client is advised that, even though HIV antibodies were not detected in the specimen, antibodies sometimes do not appear until three months from the date of exposure to the risk, and they should therefore have another test in three months' time.

If the result is reactive the client is advised to visit the Royal Victoria Hospital GUM Clinic – accompanied by a Rainbow Project staff member if they wish. Another test is carried out to confirm if it

is a reactive result. If the confirmatory test is positive the client receives support from the GUM clinic, regional HIV support team and the Rainbow Project.

The Rainbow Project's rapid HIV testing runs on Monday and Wednesday mornings at the Rainbow Project's office at 9–13 Waring Street, Belfast BT1 2DX.

For further information contact the Rainbow Project's Sexual Health Development Officer, Harry, at: harry@rainbow-project.org. To book an appointment call 028 90 319030. ■

Post exposure prophylaxis (PEP)

How is HIV passed on?

HIV is a virus. It is passed from one person to another when the blood, semen, pre-ejaculate (pre-cum), vaginal fluids or breast milk of an infected person enters the body of an uninfected person by:

- having unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex
- sharing sex toys
- using a needle or syringe (works) which has already been used by someone who is infected with HIV.

A woman with HIV can pass the virus to her baby before or during birth, or by breastfeeding.

PEP guidance

If someone has had sex in the last three days (72 hours) with someone who is HIV positive or who has a high chance of having HIV then taking a short course of anti-HIV drugs may help to prevent infection. This is known as PEP. It involves taking a course of anti-HIV drugs for four weeks.

On 20 October 2008, the Chief Medical Officer wrote to all healthcare professionals and personnel within the Northern Ireland Health Service, updating them on key documents which provide guidance on HIV, including testing for HIV infection, management of HIV infection and PEP after HIV exposure.

The three sets of guidance referenced were:

- The *UK national guidelines for HIV testing 2008* (British HIV Association, the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) and the British Infection Society).

- *HIV for non-HIV specialists, diagnosing the undiagnosed – a practical guide for healthcare professionals in secondary care to support improved detection and diagnosis of HIV in the UK* (Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health).
- *HIV post-exposure prophylaxis: guidance from the UK Chief Medical Officers' Expert Advisory Group on AIDS* (UK Department of Health).

The Chief Medical Officer recommended that all health professionals offer patients an HIV test as part of routine management.

The UK Department of Health guidelines and the BASHH *UK Guideline for the use of post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV following sexual exposure* outline clear recommendations for every hospital to make sure PEP is available and appropriately used, including after possible sexual exposure, as a potential method of preventing HIV infection. The guidelines recommend that all hospitals provide PEP for exposures in a timely manner (within 24 hours), ideally within one hour of exposure, and it is not generally recommended after 72 hours.

Adherence to these guidelines is essential so that appropriate action is taken without delay for someone potentially exposed to HIV. However the BASHH guideline states that it is important to consider PEP as only one possible preventative measure. It suggests that a risk versus benefit analysis should be undertaken for every individual with consideration given to the possibility of the individual having already been infected with HIV, and

their ability to adhere to and tolerate the proposed antiretroviral drug regimen.

Making sure that relevant front-line health staff are fully informed of the guidelines and that appropriate policies and procedures are in place in hospitals is crucial in the prevention of HIV infection. This is particularly important to prevent failures in the use of PEP due to starting it late or not following the guidelines. Moreover, the cost implications to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) when a failure to correctly initiate PEP occurs are significant. As the BASHH guideline states, a full 28-day course of PEP is approximately £600, however the lifetime cost of treatment for a person with HIV is estimated between £135,000 and £181,000.

Rainbow project research into PEP

In April 2010, the Rainbow Project carried out an out-of-hours cold-calling exercise to all accident and emergency departments at all the major hospitals in Northern Ireland. The caller stated he was a gay man who had unprotected sex with another man the night before who had subsequently told him he was living with HIV. For hospitals other than the Royal Victoria Hospital, staff were informed that the caller had a family member working in the Royal Victoria Hospital and did not feel comfortable going there as they had concerns about confidentiality. At several points during the call prompts were given to the hospital employee on PEP policy and protocols.

The majority of hospitals demonstrated a lack of knowledge about PEP, did not have policies in place, were inconsistent in their approach and some made inappropriate comments. Some were helpful but others were unfamiliar with the guidelines and either referred the caller to their GP or to the Royal Victoria Hospital.

The research project concluded that good practice regarding PEP at the Royal Victoria Hospital should not be used to justify referral there by other hospitals, especially to those living outside Belfast. This puts an unacceptable strain on this service and, given the time constraints with PEP administration, puts people at risk of not taking it within recommended timescales.

The research also suggested that the UK Department of Health guidelines and the BASHH guideline for the use of PEP for HIV following sexual exposure were not being followed or implemented to any significant degree.

In June 2010, following this exercise, the Chief Medical Officer wrote to all healthcare professionals and personnel within the Northern Ireland Health Service redirecting them to the same documents he highlighted in 2008. He also directed them to the BASHH guideline for the use of PEP for HIV following sexual exposure, stating that Health Trusts “should ensure the necessary protocols and pathways are in place so assessment for post exposure prophylaxis can occur within 72 hours of exposure.” ■

16th Annual Regional Sexual Health Conference

The 16th Annual Regional Sexual Health Conference for Northern Ireland was held on 17 November 2010 at the Lagan Valley Island Centre, Lisburn and attracted more than 130 delegates. The conference was organised by the BHSCT Sexual Health Team and funded by the Public Health Agency and BHSCT.

The conference aimed to encourage and inform a strategic approach to sexual health for Northern Ireland, and had an overarching theme of women's sexual health. The opening address was delivered by Dr Carolyn Harper, Director of Public Health from the Public Health Agency, and was followed by presentations and workshops considering a range of associated issues including:

- teenage pregnancy
- foetal alcohol syndrome
- developing an educational resource on teenage men and unplanned pregnancy

- exploring the sexual health needs of lesbian and bisexual women
- relationships and sexuality education in schools
- HIV and pregnancy
- psychological support for people living with HIV
- wellbeing and sexual health
- an update on the sexual health of Northern Ireland
- delivering on the Regional Sexual Health Promotion Strategy
- making GUM services accessible
- child sexual exploitation
- curiosity and body boundaries – an exploration of how we relate to ourselves and others.

Read the full conference report:
http://belfastsexualhealth.org/Library/conference_report.pdf. ■

Life happens: health and wellbeing training exercises to encourage resilience and development in young people

This practical training manual is packed with health and wellbeing training exercises for teachers and other professionals to use with young people aged 11 and above.

Sexual health resilience can help young people understand consent and their rights which in turn encourages positive sexual and emotional development. This manual looks at how to work with excluded and targeted young people to maintain their sexual health and wellbeing and minimise their involvement in risk taking behaviours.

Although suitable for use in mainstream settings, those working in targeted youth support, pupil referral units or with looked after young people will find it particularly useful.

Price £14.99. The manual can be purchased from FPA, tel: 0845 122 8600 or email: fpadirect@fpa.org.uk or visit www.fpa.org.uk. ■



Clinic locations

Visit www.fpa.org.uk to find clinics in Northern Ireland.

Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Clinic
5th Floor, 16 College Street, Belfast BT1 6BT
Tel: 028 90 821555
Mon, Tues and Thurs
10am–12.30pm; Weds and Fri 9am–1.30pm

Brook Northern Ireland
Belfast City Centre (Under 19s),
3rd floor, 9–13 Waring Street, Belfast BT1 2DX
Tel: 028 90 328866
Mon, Tues and Wed
2.30pm–5pm;
Thurs 5.30pm–8pm;
Fri 2pm–4.30pm;
Sat 1.30pm–4pm;
Sat (young men under 25)
4pm–5.30pm;
Sun 1.30pm–3pm

Ballysillan (under 25s)
Benview Community Centre, 80 Ballysillan Park, Belfast BT14 8HD
Tel: 028 90 719271
Weds 4.30pm–6.30pm

HYPE Team (under 25s)
5th Floor, 16 College Street, Belfast BT1 6BT
Tel: 028 90 821555
Tues 2.15pm–5pm

The Bradbury Centre
1–17 Lower Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 7AA
Tel: 028 90 912111
Mon, Tues, Weds and Thurs
9am–11.30am; Tues
5pm–7pm; Weds 5pm–7pm

Carlisle Health and Wellbeing Centre
40 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 2AX
Tel: 028 90 163758
Thurs 9am–11.30pm; Mon
and Thurs 1.45pm–4pm

Whiterock Clinic
6 Whiterock Grove, Belfast BT12 7RQ
Tel: 028 90 323153
Tues 9.30am–11.30am

Cupar Street Clinic
91 Cupar Street, Belfast BT13 2LJ
Tel: 028 90 327613
Thurs 1.45pm–4pm

Ballyowen Health Centre
179a Andersonstown Road, Belfast BT11 9EA
Tel: 028 90 610611
Mon, Weds and Fri
9am–11.30am;
Weds 1.45pm–4pm, and
5pm–7pm

Knockbreda Centre
110 Saintfield Road, Belfast BT8 6HD
Tel: 028 90 635150
1st and 3rd Tues
9am–11.30am;
Weds 9am–11.30am,
1.45pm–4pm and
4.45pm–6.45pm

Dundonald Health Centre
16 Church Road, Dundonald BT16 2LN
Tel: 028 90 534700
Thurs 9am–11.30am

Cherryvalley Health Centre
Kings Square, Belfast BT5 7EA
Tel: 028 90 798237
Tues 4.30pm–6.30pm

Hollywood Arches Health Centre
Westminster Avenue North, Belfast BT41 1QQ
Tel: 028 90 563218
Mon and Tues 1.45pm–4pm;
Weds 4.30pm–6.30pm;
Fri 9am–11.30am