

ECDC Scope and purpose document

Disease Programmes Unit/STI, Blood-Borne Viruses and TB Section

STI prevention webinar series: successful approaches to reach men who have sex with men, and heterosexual adolescents and young adults in the EU/EEA

26 March 2025 and 2 April 2025, online
Specific contract No 8 ECD.18024

Background

Every day worldwide, 1 million curable STIs are acquired among people 15–49 years old, the majority of which are asymptomatic [1]. Within the European Union and European Economic Area (EU/EEA), there have recently been considerable increases in cases of syphilis and gonorrhoea reported among men who have sex with men (MSM) as well as heterosexual men and women [2].

Between 2014 and 2023, among MSM, notifications from EU/EEA Member States to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) of gonorrhoea, syphilis, and chlamydia increased by nearly 300%, 90%, and 180% respectively [3]. Also of note, recent prevalence estimates indicate that MSM who are attending STI clinics, living with HIV or taking Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV as subgroups with highest burden of chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhoea [4].

Among heterosexual men and women, the most dramatic increase has been observed among young women, where notification rates of gonorrhoea increased by almost 200% between 2021 and 2023 among those aged 20–24 years [3]. The rising rates of bacterial STIs among young women are particularly concerning due to the risk of pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, adverse pregnancy outcomes, and long-term complications from untreated gonorrhoea, chlamydia, and syphilis infections.

The trends in EU/EEA STI surveillance data underscore the need for immediate action to prevent further transmission and mitigate the impact of STIs on public health, and achieve progress towards global targets related to ending STI epidemics by 2030 [5, 6]. Given the highly interconnected sexual networks across European countries, the European Commission Health Security Committee opinion on STIs highlights the need for EU/EEA Member State collaboration to better understand and address the recent STI trends through information exchange and sharing of good practices at European level [3].

STI prevention activities to increase testing uptake and frequency for those most at risk may be achieved by targeting specific risk groups with evidence-based messages and methods. In addition to traditional approaches, social media and dating apps should also be considered for prevention campaigns [7]. To reach MSM, it is essential to work with civil society organisations to ensure related strategies, policies and services are accessible and aligned with established emerging evidence [6, 8]. These partnerships combine expertise, resources, and community engagement to create a comprehensive multi-level response. To reach young people aged 15–24 years, social media presents a variety of opportunities as well as challenges for programmes seeking to promote sexual health and prevent HIV and other STIs [9, 10]. While the social media landscape continues to evolve, one key principle to ensure that a campaign is interesting and relevant for the intended audience, is to engage end-users and young people in the development process [9].

To facilitate country learning and exchange around these topics, ECDC is hosting a webinar series as part of the 'Country support for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections and viral hepatitis in EU/EEA countries' project:

STI prevention webinar series: approaches to reach men who have sex with men, and heterosexual adolescents and young adults in the EU/EEA

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- **26 March 2025, 15:00-16:30 CET:** Building successful partnerships with civil society and clinical services for STI prevention among MSM at high risk for STIs.
- **2 April 2025, 15:00-16:30 CET:** Let's talk about sex – raising awareness of STIs among adolescents and young adults in 2025.

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of this online webinar series organised by ECDC, the European AIDS Clinical Society (EACS) and the Centre of Excellence for Health, Immunity and Infections (CHIP) is to strengthen country capacity to:

- 1) Prevent and control gonorrhoea, syphilis, and chlamydia among high-risk MSM through the sharing of successful initiatives between public health authorities, clinicians and civil society actors; and
- 2) Raise awareness of STIs among adolescents and youth through the sharing of successful initiatives.

At the end of the webinar series, participants should:

- i. Be able to articulate the importance of partnerships between public health, civil society, and clinical services in preventing STIs and improving sexual health among high-risk MSM.
- ii. Have identified actions that they could consider taking to establish/strengthen regular cooperation with civil society actors and clinicians in their context/settings.
- iii. Be able to articulate which messages about safe sex resonate with young people today.
- iv. Be able to indicate new channels of communication with adolescents in 2025 and in the future.
- v. Have identified actions that they could consider taking to increase awareness of STIs among adolescents and young adults in their context.

Target audience

These webinars are aimed toward (i) public health practitioners and health care workers in the EU/EEA at national, regional and local levels, (ii) civil society actors and (iii) education providers.

Platform, format and approach

Each webinar will be hosted online using Zoom for a duration of 90 minutes. The format will include expert plenary presentations and open discussion/Q&A.

We have selected relevant documents related to the webinar content as background material. These materials provide support to the planned webinar presentations and discussions:

- ECDC:
 - [Annual Epidemiological Reports on STIs](#)
 - [A systematic review of chlamydia, gonorrhoea, trichomoniasis, and syphilis prevalence in Europe](#)
 - Video: [Don't give gonorrhoea a ride!](#)
 - Video: [Bacterial sexually transmitted infections – why do we see the rise?](#)
 - Video: [How big of a threat are the bacterial sexually transmitted infections?](#)
- European Commission: [Opinion of the Health Security Committee on Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)

Expected outputs and evaluations

Before each webinar concludes, participants will be asked to respond to 5-7 quantitative standardised evaluation questions regarding feedback on the webinar organisation and overall impact.

The recordings for both webinars, in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), will be publicly accessible for later viewing on the ECDC Learning Portal for infectious diseases.

Webinar agendas

26 March 2025, 15:00-16:30 CET		
Building successful partnerships with civil society and clinical services for STI prevention among MSM at high-risk for STIs		
Time	Purpose and activity	Presenter/facilitator
15:00	Welcome & house rules	Anne Louise Grevsen, ECDC (P) Ulla Blomhøj, COBL (P)
15:02	Introduction & polls	Daniel McCartney, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) (F)
15:07	Setting the stage: epidemiological background	Otilia Mardh, ECDC (P)
15:12	Country presentation: Croatia	Josip Begovac, University Hospital for Infectious Diseases (P) Tatjana Nemeth-Blažić, Institute of Public Health (P) Daniel McCartney, LSHTM (F)
15:29	Country presentation: Sweden	Victor Westergren, Venhälsen (P) Daniel McCartney, LSHTM (F)
15:34	Country presentation: Malta	Robert Attard, Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement (P) Maria Axisa, Department of Health Regulation (P) Daniel McCartney, LSHTM (F)
15:46	Panel discussion & plenary Q&A	Representatives from all 3 countries and Robert Hejzák from Czech AIDS Society (ČSAP) Daniel McCartney, LSHTM (F)
15:51	Evaluation and closing	Anne Louise Grevsen, CHIP (P)

2 April 2025, 15:00-16:30 CET		
Let's talk about sex – raising awareness of STIs among adolescents and young adults in 2025		
Time	Purpose and activity	Presenter/facilitator
15:00	Welcome & house rules	Sarah North, CHIP (P) Ulla Blomhøj, COBL (P)
15:05	Introduction & polls	Evelien Spek, Soa Aids Nederland (F)
15:10	Setting the stage: epidemiological background	Lina Nerlander, ECDC (P)
15:15	Country presentation: Ireland	Muireann Kirby, Health Service Executive Ireland (P)
15:30	Country presentation: France	Evelien Spek, Soa Aids Nederland (F)
15:45	ECDC Influencer presentation: Spain	Léila Roebben, Santé publique France (P)
15:50	Panel discussion with presenters and plenary Q&A	Muireann Kirby, Health Service Executive Ireland (P) Nicola O'Connell, Health Service Executive Ireland (P) Léila Roebben, Santé publique France (P) Leigh Bennet, ECDC (P) Mikolaj Handzlik, ECDC (P) Evelien Spek, Soa Aids Nederland (F)
16:25	Evaluation and closing	Sarah North, CHIP (P)

References

1. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs): Key Facts. [press release]. Geneva: World Health Organization (WHO), 21 May 2024.
2. STI cases continue to rise across Europe [press release]. Stockholm: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), 10 February 2025.
3. Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety. Response to the increase in sexually transmitted infections in the EU/EEA: Health Security Committee Opinion. Luxembourg; 2024.
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5. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Ending Inequalities and Getting on Track to End AIDS by 2030. Geneva: UNAIDS; 2021. Available from: https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2021/2021_political-declaration-on-hiv-and-aids.
6. World Health Organization (WHO). Regional action plans for ending AIDS and the epidemics of viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections 2022–2030. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2023. Available from: <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289058957>.
7. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Gonorrhoea. In: ECDC. Annual epidemiological report for 2023. Stockholm: ECDC; 2025. Available from: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/gonorrhoea-annual-epidemiological-report-2023#:~:text=Stockholm%3A%20ECDC%3B%202025.&text=For%202023%2C%2096%20969%20confirmed,notification%20rate%20compared%20with%202022>.
8. World Health Organization (WHO). Global health sector strategies on, respectively, HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections for the period 2022–2030. Geneva: WHO; 2022. Available from: <https://www.who.int/teams/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes/strategies/global-health-sector-strategies>.
9. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Utilising social media to support HIV/STI prevention: evidence to inform a handbook for public health programme managers. Stockholm: ECDC; 2017. Available from: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/utilising-social-media-support-hivsti-prevention-evidence-inform-handbook-public>.
10. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Utilising social media for HIV/STI prevention programmes among young people. Stockholm: ECDC; 2017. Available from: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/utilising-social-media-hivsti-prevention-programmes-among-young-people>.

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