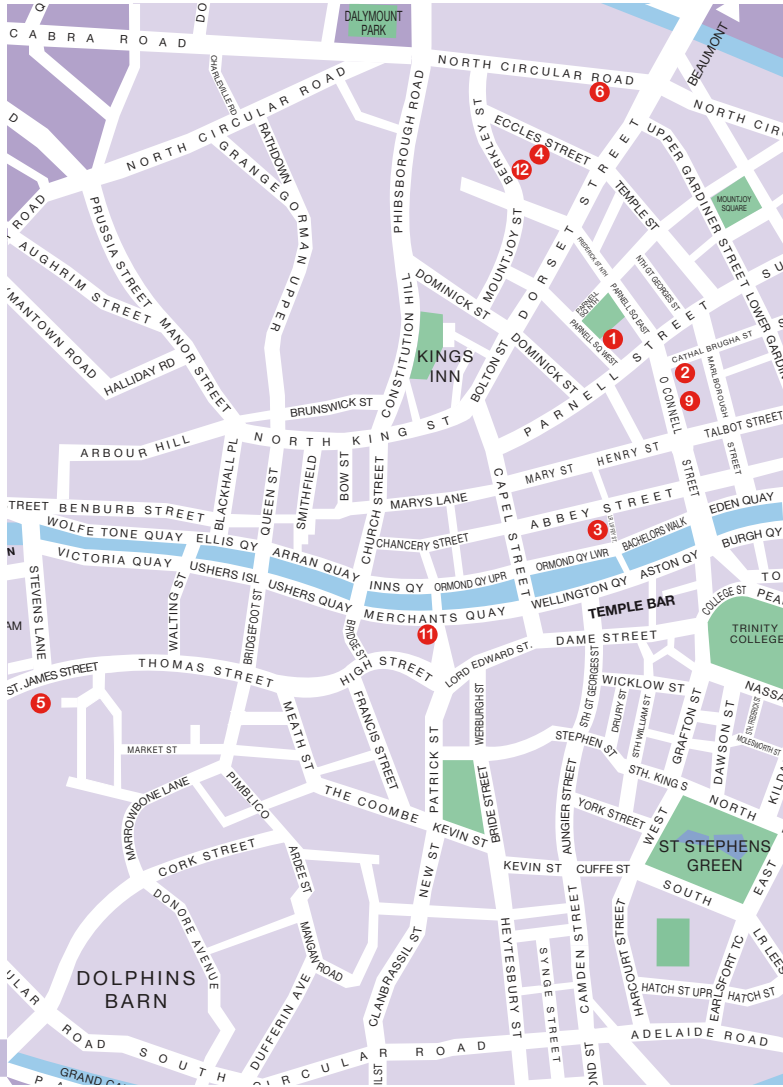


the
**DON'T
PANIC
GUIDE**



to sexual health



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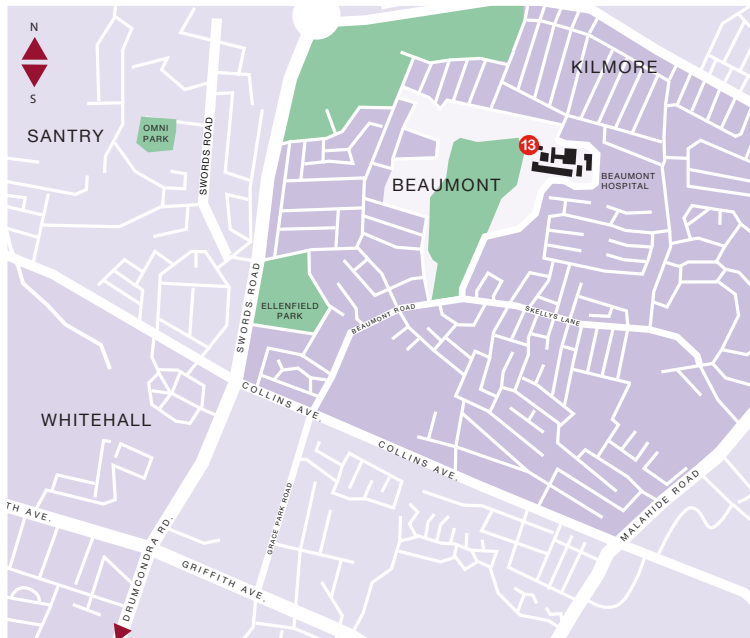
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1. **Dublin AIDS Alliance**
53 Parnell Square Wst.
2. **Every Woman Clinic**
Cathal Brugha Street
3. **Wellwoman Clinic**
35 Lower Liffey Street
4. **Wellman Clinic**
79 Eccles Street
5. **St James' Hospital**
GUIDE Clinic
James' Street
6. **Mater Hospital**
Nth. Circular Rd.
7. **Baggot Street**
HIV Testing Centre
19 Haddington Road
8. **Gay Men's Health**
Service Clinic,
19 Haddington Road
9. **Citizens Information**
Centre O'Connell St.
10. **Rape Crisis Centre**
70 Lwr. Leeson Street
11. **Merchants Quay**
Ireland Drug Project
4 Merchants Quay
12. **Marie Stopes**
10-11 Berkeley St., D7
13. **Beaumont Hospital**
Dublin 9



the DON'T PANIC GUIDE to sexual health

♥ A heartfelt thanks to all who participated in the focus groups ♥



Welcome to the “**DON'T PANIC GUIDE to sexual health**”. It is our hope that this guide will give you an overview of sexual health and sexual health services in Dublin. However, we thought it might be useful to first explain how the general health system operates in Ireland.

Overview

Initially, it is important that you have a **General Practitioner (GP)**. A GP is a doctor who works from a local health practice rather than a hospital. A GP is responsible for your general health. You will need to pay to see your GP unless you have a **Medical Card** or **GP Visit Card**.



If a GP believes that you require more specialist attention, he or she will refer you to a **Consultant** who will be usually located in a hospital.



Some medications can only be prescribed by your GP but others you will be able to buy **over-the-counter** (directly from a chemist/pharmacy).



People who are unemployed or on low income are entitled to a **Medical Card** or **GP Visit Card**. This entitles you to free GP services and most prescribed drugs. You are also entitled to both in-patient and out-patient hospital services as well as maternity and dental services.



Those with private health insurance and/or paying **Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI)** can claim back costs for services by completing a **Med 1 Form**. You may be entitled to avail of the **Drug Payment Scheme**.

If you have a question about the health service, your entitlements, or how to access health or social services in your area, telephone **Health Service Executive (HSE) National Helpline - 1850 24 1850**.

If you have a serious emergency health situation, you can go to your nearest hospital and present at the **Accident and Emergency Department (A&E)**. If you attend without a GP referral letter then you will need to pay for the visit.

Please feel free to get in touch with Community Support at **Dublin AIDS Alliance - 01 873 3799** if you would like to discuss anything in more detail or if you just require further information.



If you ever need an ambulance, dial 999 or 112 and give the operator your name and address.



Sexuality & Sexual Health



Sexuality is an important part of being human, regardless of your sexual orientation.

Being informed on sexual health is your right and responsibility.

Taking care of your sexual health should be a part of your overall health routine.

Sexual health is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as:

“the integration of physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of sexuality in a way that positively enriches and promotes personality, communication and love.”





Contraception

Other than not having sex, condoms are the best way to prevent **both** sexually transmitted infections & unplanned pregnancy. Other barrier methods include the female condom, which is inserted inside the vagina before sex and dental dams, which are used for safer oral sex.



Both the morning-after pill and the birth control pill are **only available by prescription**.



Condoms are available from most shops and chemists and they are free from some sexual health clinics and organisations. Other types of contraception can be obtained from your GP or other health services and costs will vary.



Many people are unaware that abortion is **illegal in Ireland**. If you need to discuss pregnancy options, please see directory at the back of this booklet.



Remember, you **can** get pregnant the first time you have sex, and you **can** get pregnant during menstruation.



STIs



Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are infections that are usually contracted through sexual activity. They can be transmitted through vaginal, anal, or oral sex (mouth to genital) or through close genital contact.

The majority of people who have an STI may not experience any symptoms. The only way to tell whether you have an STI is to go for a test.



However, some symptoms to look out for include:

- itchiness
- unusual discharge & smell
- pain on urination
- sores, ulcers, blisters or warts in genital area
- unusual spots/traces of blood from vagina or penis





If you experience any of these symptoms, it is important to go for an STI test.

If left untreated, some STIs can cause serious health complications like impotence, infertility, anal or cervical cancer, and possible death.

STIs can be transmitted to infants during birth causing complications for them if left untreated. There are medications available to prevent transmission of STIs from mother to her unborn baby.



Although some STIs are not curable, the majority of symptoms can be treated.

It only takes one encounter with one infected partner to contract an STI.



Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a serious STI which affects the immune system. It can be prevented with the right information and knowledge.

HIV can be transmitted through:

- Blood
- Sperm and vaginal fluids
- Mother to unborn baby
- Breastfeeding
- Rectal Secretions



You **can** be infected by sharing needles for drug use, tattooing or piercing, or through sharing sex toys, razors or toothbrushes.

You **can** also become infected by having a blood transfusion in a country which does not screen the blood for infectious diseases or by receiving injections in a health clinic where sterile injecting equipment is not used.

You **cannot** be infected with HIV through sweat, saliva, hugging, kissing, sharing cups, utensils, toilet seats, mosquitoes, animal bites, etc.



Pregnant women in Ireland are offered STI testing as the transmission of HIV from mother to unborn baby can be greatly reduced or eliminated through effective medicines.

Hospital treatment and medication for HIV and STIs is free in Ireland regardless of nationality or immigration status.

Medication for HIV is called **Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART)**. HIV is now considered a 'chronic disease' which can be treated and managed.

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) can be delayed or prevented by HAART medication.

PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis) is a medical treatment option available for those who may have had a very recent exposure to HIV. PEP works to prevent HIV from establishing itself in the bloodstream. Treatment must be taken as soon as possible and within 72 hours (3 days) of possible exposure. PEP is only available by prescription from hospital Accident and Emergency departments or from sexual health clinics.



Testing Options



Public Testing... is available free of charge in Dublin at **St James' Hospital, Mater Hospital, Beaumont Hospital,** and **Gay Men's Health Service.** You can make an appointment or just walk-in at particular times. The results will take a few weeks to be returned to you. Please contact the hospitals directly to find out clinic and appointment times.

Private Testing... is available from **Marie Stopes Reproductive Choices,** the **Irish Family Planning Association, Well Woman** or **Well Man** clinics and many **GPs.** The cost for this will vary, but results will take just a few days to be returned to you.

Results can take up to three weeks to be returned to you but this can vary between different clinics.

Please see directory of services at the back of this booklet.

STI and HIV testing is confidential.

It can take from 1-3 months for a person who has been infected with HIV to test positive. This is called the '**window period**'. If you are tested during this period, you may need to return up to six months after your risk exposure for a final results test.



The outcomes of an HIV or STI test **will not affect** a person's legal status here.



STI and HIV treatment and care in a public hospital is **free** to all in Ireland.



“Safer Sex”

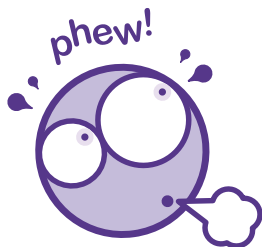
Safer sex involves knowing the risks, negotiating, consenting & protecting each other, and being tested regularly if you are sexually active.

Always make sure you buy or receive condoms from a reputable source. Condoms which are of good quality will have a ‘**CE**’ mark on the package, and will show the expiry date. Some may also have a quality standard ‘**kitemark**’ (see opposite).



Remember that alcohol & drug use can influence your ability to make safer sexual choices.

Don't forget that GPs, doctors and hospitals are used to dealing with these issues. You won't have anything they haven't seen before!



Sexual Health Services



Sexual Health and Support Agencies

Dublin AIDS Alliance - (01) 873 3799
53 Parnell Square West, Dublin 1
www.dublainaidsalliance.ie

Dublin AIDS Alliance works to improve conditions for people living with, or affected by, HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis. Services include support, counselling, outreach, advocacy and mediation as well as provision of STI and drug use information. All services are free of charge.

Red Ribbon Project, Limerick - (061) 314 354
www.redribbonproject.com

Sexual Health Centre, Cork - (021) 427 5837
www.sexualhealthcentre.com

AIDS West Ltd, Galway - (091) 566 266
www.aidswest.ie

HIV Support Centre, Belfast - (028) 9024 9268
www.aids helpline.org.uk

Family Planning Agencies

Options Crisis Pregnancy Services - 1850 495 051
www.positiveoptions.ie

Every Woman Clinic - (01) 872 7088
(Irish Family Planning Association)
Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin 1
www.ifpa.ie

Marie Stopes Reproductive Choices -
www.reproductivechoices.ie (01) 830 0630


Wellwoman Clinic - 35 Lower Liffey Street, Dublin 1 www.wellwomancentre.ie	(01) 872 8051
Wellman Clinic - 79 Eccles Street, Dublin 7	(01) 860 0364

Testing Options +

St James' Hospital GUIDE Clinic - James' Street, Dublin 8 www.guide2guide.ie	(01) 416 2315
Mater Hospital, Nth. Circular Rd., Dublin 7 - www.mater.ie	(01) 803 2930
Beaumont Hospital, Beaumont, Dublin 9 - www.beaumont.ie	(01) 809 3006
Baggot Street HIV Testing Centre - 19 Haddington Road, Dublin 4	1800 201 187
Gay Men's Health Service Clinic - 19 Haddington Road, Dublin 4	1800 201 187 / 669 9553

Other Useful Organisations

Citizen's Information Centre - www.citizensinformation.ie	1890 777 121
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre - www.drcc.ie	1800 778 888
HSE National Helpline - www.hse.ie	1850 241 850
HIV Services Network www.hivireland.ie	
Merchants Quay Ireland - (Drugs / Homelessness) www.mqi.ie	(01) 524 0160
Drugs / HIV Helpline -	1800 459 459
Open Heart House - (HIV Peer Support) www.openhearthouse.ie	(01) 830 5000

Useful numbers for your wallet or purse 

Useful phone numbers:

Dublin AIDS Alliance	(01) 873 3799
St James' Hospital GUIDE Clinic	(01) 416 2315
Mater Hospital	(01) 803 2930
Beaumont Hospital	(01) 809 3006
Baggot Street HIV Testing Centre	1800 201 187
Every Woman Clinic	(01) 872 7088
Options Crisis Pregnancy Services	1850 495 051
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre	1800 778 888



Produced by
Dublin AIDS Alliance

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