

**Women's
sexual health**

Women
4 Women



This guide will explain areas of women's and reproductive health, and help you to make your own informed decisions

What is good sexual health?

Condoms and internal condoms

PrEP

PEP

U=U and testing

Contraception options

Cervical screening

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About Positive East

Positive East has been at the forefront of HIV service and care for over 30 years; supporting people from the point of HIV diagnosis to longer term care. Guided by our mission – to improve the quality of life of individuals and communities affected by HIV – Positive East has developed a holistic range of health and wellbeing programmes from counselling, peer support and benefit advice to HIV testing, prevention and outreach. Based in Stepney Green, East London, over 3,000 people access Positive East's services annually.

About Women4Women

Positive East's W4W is an asset-based community engagement approach which skills up black women of African and Caribbean descent to become community champions to raise awareness of PrEP and good sexual health.



Why Women 4 Women?

Did you know that in 2023 the number of women in the UK diagnosed with HIV increased by 30%, and this was disproportionately among people of Black African heritage? But both of these groups were under-represented in trials for PrEP in the UK.

We want to address this, with a particular focus on HIV prevention for Black women who are under informed, and being under prescribed PrEP for HIV prevention.



What is good sexual health?

Accepting that sexual desire and pleasure is normal

Being comfortable with your own and other people's sexual identity

Undertaking sexual health checks

Using the contraception of your choice

Using HIV prevention methods that work for you



Condoms and internal condoms

Condoms are a simple and effective way to prevent STIs, HIV and pregnancy.

Condoms come in a range of sizes, textures and materials, so try different types to see what works best for you!

You can get a range of free condoms from Positive East including internal condoms, and latex free.

Talk about using condoms with your partner before sex and incorporate condoms into your foreplay fun.

Remember to only use water or latex based lube (as oil based lube can cause breakage) and never reuse a condom.

PrEP

PrEP stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis and is a medication taken before and after sex to prevent HIV, even if you're not using condoms.

PrEP is safe and effective, and available for free on the NHS.

PrEP only protects you from HIV and does not prevent STIs or pregnancy.



Scan the QR code
to watch our W4W
PrEP film



Dosing of PrEP

There are a few ways you can take PrEP, all of which are effective.

Daily dosing

If you decide to take PrEP daily, you'll need to take one pill at the same time each day for at least 7 days before you plan to have sex. This will build up enough medication in your system for both vaginal and anal sex.

If you decide to stop taking PrEP daily, you'll need to take one pill daily from seven days from the last time you had sex.

Event-based dosing for vaginal and frontal sex

Take 2 tablets between 2 hours and 24 hours before condomless sex. Then 1 tablet daily for the next 7 days.

Event-based dosing for anal sex

Take 2 tablets between 2 and 24 hours before sex. Then 1 tablet daily for 2 days.

Always follow the instructions from the health care professionals and undertake the HIV and tests advised.



PEP

PEP stands for post-exposure prophylaxis and is a course of medication taken after potential exposure to HIV.

PEP needs to be started within 72 hours (3 days) of when you had sex and continued for 28 days. This is effective for both vaginal and anal sex.

PEP is available for free at sexual health (GUM) clinics or A&E.



U=U

U=U stands for

Undetectable = Untransmittable

This means, if you are living with HIV and on effective treatment with an undetectable viral load, it is biologically impossible to pass the virus on during sex (even when not using condoms).

HIV treatment is known as ART and works by stopping the virus replicating in the body. Whilst it does not cure HIV, it is a very effective treatment and enables most people to live long and healthy lives.

It is important to start HIV treatment right away after being diagnosed to protect your health and become undetectable.

Test often

One of the best ways to stop HIV being passed on is to know your own status.

5% of people living with HIV are unaware of their status, so could be passing HIV on. Testing regularly breaks the cycle!

At Positive East you can test for HIV with a small finger prick, and you'll know your HIV status in 15 minutes.

You can also test for chlamydia, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and syphilis in your appointment.



Contraception options

There are some things to think about when deciding on contraception:

Long-term or short-term protection?

When do you plan to have a child?

Do you want hormonal or non-hormonal protection?

What are the side effects?

Do you want to have periods?

Your local NHS sexual health service provides a wide range of services and will help you make the choice that is right for you.

Scan this QR code to learn more about contraception options:



Cervical screening and HPV vaccination

Cervical screening is the best way to protect yourself from cervical cancer. The screen detects the presence of certain human papilloma virus (HPV) strains on the cervix.

HPV can cause cervical, anal and vulval cancer. Early detection can be easily treated and saves lives.

In the UK women are invited for a screening every 3 years and is available to women and people with a cervix aged 25–64 years.

The HPV vaccine protects against the HPV strains responsible for cervical and anal cancer. It is free on the NHS for those between the ages of 12–25.

Fibroids

Fibroids are non-cancerous growths that develop in and around the womb (uterus) and grow as a single tumour or in clusters.

Fibroids are common in women aged 25–45 and are 2–3 times more common in Afro-Caribbean women, where they tend to be larger and more numerous.

Symptoms can include heavy menstrual bleeding, painful periods, passing clots, lower back ache, feeling full, painful sex, constipation.

If concerned make an appointment to see your GP. Diagnosis involves ultrasound scan or MRI/CT scan.

For more information go to britishfibroidtrust.org.uk

Vulval & vaginal health

The first step to vulval health is to know what your vulva and labia look like, so you know what is normal for you.

Most women will experience candida and/or bacterial vaginosis (BV).

They are not STIs. Both are caused by an imbalance of normal good and bad flora that live within the vagina. Both can be treated with over-the-counter treatments.

Both conditions can leave you vulnerable to STIs.



To help look after yourself:

Use water and plain soap to clean your vulva

Use lubricant during sex to protect the skin barrier

Don't wash your vulva with products containing fragrances

Don't use antiseptics in your bath water

Don't use vaginal deodorants

Use non-bio washing power

Periods

A period is the part of the menstrual cycle when bleeding occurs. This usually happens around every 28 days, but can range from every 21–35 days. They last between 2–7 days, with heavier bleeding in the first 2 days.

Your period may change, and this does not always mean there's a problem. But speak to your GP if your periods become irregular, you miss periods or you bleed in between periods or after sex, or your period becomes very painful or heavy and affects your life.

Hormonal changes before your period can cause symptoms called PMS. These can include stomach cramps, bloating, changes in mood and headaches, plus many more.



Menopause

The menopause is a natural process that occurs usually between the ages of 45–55 when your ovaries have ran out of eggs and stop producing hormones (oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone) and your periods stop.

Symptoms can be all or a combination of; hot flushes, night sweats, period changes, mood swings, vulval and vaginal dryness & pain, brain fog, loss of sexual desire and a lot more.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) replaces oestrogen and progesterone and is a safe and effective way of managing symptoms. However, there are other options available if you cannot have or choose not to have HRT, so speak to your GP to find the best treatment option for you.

Where to access support

vulvalpainsociety.org

endometriosis-uk.org

contraceptionchoices.org

menopausematters.co.uk

[nhs.uk/conditions/menopause](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause)

[nhs.uk/conditions/cervical-screening](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cervical-screening)

[nhs.uk/conditions/periods](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods)

[nhs.uk/vaccinations/hpv-vaccine](https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/hpv-vaccine)

Check out our website for more sexual health information or book a test.

positiveeast.org.uk

You can also order test kits online from www.shl.uk





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